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Workplace Toxicity, Leadership Behaviors, and Leadership Strategies

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Abstract

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MA, Southern New Hampshire University, 2012

BS, Hesser College, 2008

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Management Leadership and Organizational Change

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Abstract

Workplace toxicity may negatively influence the well-being and work performance of employees. Best practices of successful leadership approaches and behaviors have been unidentified when addressing low-toxicity work environments. The purpose of this qualitative narrative case study was to develop a deeper understanding of how leaders selected and applied specific leadership strategies and behaviors in nontoxic workplace environments. Data were collected from 10 participants in New Hampshire using a purposive sampling technique and semistructured interviews based on Alvarado's triangular model of workplace toxicity. This study was structured using a narrative approach to explore ways positive leaders practically implemented styles and behaviors to mitigate workplace toxicity. All participants met this study's qualification parameters; they had past experiences with toxic leaders that shaped their personal leadership styles. NVivo was used to compare and analyze data from all interview transcripts entered for recurring themes. These themes were coded according to how answers connected to a specific research question, and findings were collated across interviews to form results. Three major themes emerged from the data: experience with toxic leadership, leadership approaches to toxicity, and leadership behaviors toward toxicity. Insights from this study may help company leaders avoid lawsuits, low productivity levels, and high staff turnover due to toxic workplace elements left unattended or ineffectively managed. The study may contribute to positive social change by generating practical models of and suggestions for creating a less toxic work environment, thereby creating healthier and happier employees, which increases public wellbeing and company success.

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Dedication

More than to anyone else, I dedicate this work to the memory of my mother, Hoeriyah-Karlijn, the great matriarch of the Atmadja family of Java-Indonesia. When I was a child, she told me that if I did not go to school, I would be poor and have no future. As a result, as a child, I was afraid to be poor and have no future, even though I didn't know what that meant. I read and I read, and I earned good grades, as she cleverly pulled our family business, a local farm, into the international market producing rice, cocoa, and cloves.

With this dissertation that I dedicate to her, I follow the educational tradition she established. I join her, my late father, and my sister—four people in two generations—by receiving a doctorate. We will never be poor, and we will always have a future.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Toxic leadership is of growing interest in current research. Researchers have expressed interest in discovering the consequences of toxic leadership on workers and overall company success and in determining traits that toxic leaders exhibit to counter such traits or avoid hiring those who exhibit such traits into leadership positions (Fischbacher-Smith, 2015; Keller Hansborough & Jones, 2014; Mathieu, Neumann, Hare, & Babiak, 2014; O'Hara, 2015; Schmidt, 2014). In addition, recent researchers have studied transformational leadership and applied such positive leadership within different working environments to mitigate workplace toxicity (Breevaart et al., 2014; Tse & Chiu, 2014).

In recent years, workplace diversity studies have gained momentum due to workplaces becoming more dynamic and inclusive (Bond & Haynes, 2014; Hunt, Layton, & Prince, 2014; Ng & Sears, 2012). General society has also begun to learn from and undo the wrongs of the past by drawing attention to issues, such as gender-, race-, and/or sexuality-based discrimination (Jones & Williams, 2013; Mizzi, 2017; Nadal, Davidoff, Davis, & Wong, 2014). Researchers have asked for awareness of diversity and representativeness in the workplace (Appannah & Biggs, 2015; Burton, 2015).

The results of this qualitative narrative case study incorporated further information into the current research related to workplace diversity, such as from Bond and Haynes (2014), Jones and Williams (2013), and Appannah and Biggs (2015), by investigating workplace toxicity. To do so, I took a narrative approach to studying ways in which positive leaders practically implemented styles and behaviors to mitigate

workplace toxicity. The findings of this study might have positive social implications by providing workplace leaders with suggestions from the study participants for mitigating workplace toxicity to lead to happier and more satisfied workers (Belias & Koustelios, 2014).

This chapter includes the background of the topic, the problem of this study, and the purpose of this study. I also outline the research questions and theoretical framework guiding this study. The chapter includes information on the nature of the study; definitions of important terminology used in the study, assumptions, scope, delimitations, limitations; and the study's significance and contribution to the literature.

Background

Researchers have determined that leaders can influence worker wellbeing and working environments (Mathieu et al., 2014; Sun, Gergen, Avila, & Green, 2016; Tse & Chiu, 2014). Hadadian and Zarei (2016) determined that toxic leadership directly correlated to increased levels of job stress for employees. Similarly, Mehta and Maheshwari (2014) explained that toxic leadership translated to low employee and overall company performance. In contrast, Tse and Chiu (2014), and Pradhan and Pradhan (2015) confirmed that nontoxic, transformational, or positive leadership could lead to improved employee satisfaction and well-being, lower levels of employee and leadership stress, and generally more successful companies.

Researchers have depicted how toxic work environments were often cyclical (Field, 2014; Padilla, Hogan, & Kaiser, 2007). Negative leadership could translate to demotivated and stressed workers, who might feed into the negativity and lessen

company success that would cause the cycle to continue (Erickson, Shaw, Murray, & Branch, 2017; Padilla et al., 2007). Fraher (2016) examined this kind of cycle and discovered the toxic triangle. Through the concept of the toxic triangle, Fraher determined workers, leaders, and the general work environment all interplayed with one another, with toxic or nontoxic behaviors filtering down from the top leader down, and then between factors. Leaders must prioritize nontoxic leadership to ensure nontoxic work environments (Breevaart et al., 2014). Leaders stepping into a toxic environment due to a predecessor's negative approaches or other factors might need to employ nontoxic leadership strategies to improve or counteract the toxic leanings of workers and the general environment (Erickson et al., 2017).

Field (2014) verified that workplace toxicity ensued through prolonged negativity. Workers and/or leaders may face conflict regarding broken expectations that can lead to negativity (Field, 2014). Such breaks or disappointments are bound to occur when different individuals share space and interactions, such as in a workplace (Jain & Kaur, 2014). If leaders effectively and timeously address such negativity, they may avoid workplace toxicity (Day, Fleenor, Atwater, Sturm, & McKee, 2014). The longer leaders take or the less effective they are at addressing a particular negative, the more likely employees can lean toward negative attitudes, gossip, and other toxic behaviors (Burns, 2017; Woestman & Wasonga, 2015). This negativity will then spread, and more individuals will become prone to negative behaviors and attitudes, further perpetuating the cycle of toxicity (Burns, 2017; Woestman & Wasonga, 2015). Leaders should employ positive leadership styles and behaviors by implementing clear and productive problem-

solving to limit the potential for toxicity developing in the work environment and thereby influencing the wellbeing and productivity of workers (Field, 2014).

Leonard (2014) recommended that researchers must study ways to address toxic leadership as such research would improve working environments. The author's appeal for more research into redressing toxic leadership and thereby improving working environments denotes a gap in the current literature (Leonard, 2014). I met Leonard's (2014) call for additional research to fill the gap by investigating leadership and leadership strategies for nontoxic work environments.

Cotton (2016) explored means for employees to cope with toxic work environments. Cotton determined that a current gap in the literature regarding if and how positive leadership could counter toxic work environments, especially from the leader perspective. I filled this gap by producing research regarding leaders' positive leadership style and behavior choices, as well as how such choices addressed toxicity in the workplace. I filled noted gaps in the literature related to leadership approaches, behaviors, and means for lowering workplace toxicity (see Cotton, 2016; see Leonard, 2014). I filled such gaps to understand better leadership approaches and behaviors that led to improved leadership and assisted in improving the work environment. Better work environments could lead to happier and more productive workers, thereby benefiting businesses and the greater society (Belias & Koustelios, 2014; Field, 2014).

Problem Statement

The general problem was that negative leaders were negatively affecting the wellbeing and work performance of their employees. When a workplace environment

contains toxic elements, the wellbeing of employees can be compromised (Galupo & Resnick, 2016). Bell (2017) concluded that 78% of people have been negatively influenced from working under toxic leadership. Leadership approaches make clear the overall strategies leaders choose to motivate their subordinates to achieve goals, while leadership behaviors are the specific actions leaders take to influence their subordinates to achieve goals (Cummings et al., 2010).

The specific problem was that when negative leaders affected the workplace environment, the workplace becomes unfavorable, which decreased productivity and results in other problems, such as poor employee retention. In negative workplace environments, Field (2014) defined toxicity as problematic. Tse and Chiu (2014), Day et al. (2014), and Padilla et al. (2007) confirmed that leadership might influence workplace toxicity, for better and worse. According to Anjum, Ming, Siddiqi, and Rasool (2018), 80% of the issues associated with employees' productivity were related to the workplace environment in which these employees completed their day-to-day duties. Researchers have not yet outlined the impact of leadership approaches and behaviors. Researchers have instead tended to look more generally at leadership's influence regarding trends in leadership development. Instead, they have tended to only focus on one leadership style rather than a range or comparison of varying styles or addressing factors relating to toxic leadership, with little mention of countermeasures or nontoxic leader attributes (Day et al., 2014; Padilla et al., 2007; Tse & Chiu, 2014). I filled such gaps by addressing various leadership approaches, styles, and strategies relating to mitigating toxic work environments.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative narrative case study was to develop a deeper understanding of how leaders selected and applied specific strategies and behaviors in nontoxic workplaces to improve the condition of the environment. This study was specifically focused on the ways that leaders improved the state of toxic workplaces with a population of employees working for two government and nongovernment institutions in the state of New Hampshire. Understanding leaders' explanations as to how they selected effective workplace behaviors and approaches, and how these lowered workplace toxicity, was an essential step in determining how other workplace leaders could mitigate workplace toxicity. Alleviating workplace toxicity is important for ensuring the happiness, well-being, and safety of employees in any company, making it an essential topic for further investigation (Bell, 2017).

To facilitate this purpose, I conducted lengthy interviews of approximately three hours each. The interviews consisted of semistructured questions for participants to relate in-depth answers that included personal stories, as required for narrative studies (Lewis, 2015). As this study was also a case study in design, additional data were gathered for data triangulation purposes through the respective firms' published policy documentation regarding creating healthy and happy work environments (Lewis, 2015). The interview and documentation data were further substantiated with archival, academic research defining toxic leadership.

Data were collected from 10 participants from two government and nongovernment institutions located in the state of New Hampshire. Participants were

sampled using a purposive sampling technique. Researchers can use purposive sampling to ensure that only people who best correspond to the needs of a study are included for participation (Eiken, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). For purposive sampling purposes, I determined two selection criteria for this study: (a) participants should have worked in their current leadership capacity at their given firm for at least five years; and (b) participants should have previous experience in a toxic work environment, either as an employee under a toxic leader or as a nontoxic leader entering and needing to fix a toxic work environment.

Research Questions

There were two research questions in place to guide this study. The answers to the research questions were derived from the overarching themes that were identified in the participants' responses to the interview questions. These research questions were as follows:

RQ1: What leadership approaches do effective, nontoxic leaders apply to reduce toxicity?

RQ2: What leadership behaviors do effective, nontoxic leaders apply to reduce toxicity?

Conceptual Framework

For the conceptual framework, I used Alvarado's (2016) triangular model of workplace toxicity. Alvarado posited this three-part model to explain the associations between toxic work environments, toxic subordinates, and toxic leadership. Fraher (2016) specified this model as the *toxic triangle*, and Alvarado (2016) developed a scale

associated with this model to measure workplace toxicity. The author classified this scale as the Work Environment Scale of Toxicity (AWEST). To contribute qualitative evidence to the development of the AWEST, Alvarado (2016) surveyed 280 participants who worked in a physical workspace for over 2 years. Alvarado depicted four factors that contributed to the toxicity of the workplace: perceived threat, favoritism, bullying, and overall organizational climate. Through an analysis of the surveyed participants answers, Alvarado uncovered what factors influenced toxicity and then used these factors to refine the AWEST.

As Alvarado (2016) explained, the triangular toxicity model accounted for the complexities that contributed to destructive leadership. I used this model to construct a perspective to demystify why if a single action was taken, such as replacing an abusive leader, firing employees with attitude problems, or fixing detrimental aspects of company culture, toxicity might remain in the workplace. Using Alvarado's (2016) findings, I examined all four components of the triangular model when toxicity in the workplace was identified. A toxic workplace environment is recognized as one that is characteristic of unfavorable experiences that poorly affect employees (Anjum et al., 2018). According to Anjum et al. (2018), toxic behaviors in the workplace can result in added expenses, overall lower company spirit, low rates of retention, poor work-life balance, worsening health, frequent call-outs, and lower productivity overall. Participants provided information about their experiences with resolving the state of toxic workplace environments, while also providing input about their past experiences aside from the current environment in which they work, which was also discussed. I used AWEST to

examine how the leadership component influenced the toxicity of the work environment and subordinate employees. I studied how positive leadership could lead to lowering instances of toxicity to determine potential alternatives to toxic leadership styles and behaviors. AWEST and the conceptual framework of this study are portrayed more comprehensively in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

I conducted this study using a qualitative method with a narrative case study design. The narrative methodology was devised to gather detailed, first-hand stories or narratives from leaders regarding how leadership behaviors and approaches might mitigate, reduce, or even remove toxicity within the workplace (see Taylor, Bogdan, & DeVault, 2015). Narrative researchers try to gain in-depth insight from those most affected by or part of a studied topic or issue (Lewis, 2015). In this study, the issue was toxic leadership, related workplace toxicity, and how these affect the overall environment. Leaders used the narrative design to expound on their experiences of addressing workplace toxicity through applying positive approaches, as opposed to toxic leadership approaches. Their perspectives on what worked and why, what has led them to make their specific leadership style and behavior choices, and where they may approach similar situations differently in the future were collected for closer inspection.

Narrative stories can propound the identities of individuals and how they see themselves (Taylor et al., 2015). Regarding this study, this approach showed if, how, and why leaders might consider themselves and their leadership approaches nontoxic and the role their choices toward positive leadership might have played in lowering workplace

toxicity. I used a narrative approach to examine how workplace toxicity was alleviated through effective leadership behaviors and approaches, as well as how all the components of toxicity, as outlined by Alvarado (2016), influenced one another.

Due to the story nature of the study, a longer interview process was needed (see Lewis, 2015). I conducted interviews of approximately three hours with each participant, in either one 3-hour session or three 1-hour sessions. Robinson (2014) stated this narrative interview process was intensive, and qualitative researchers would require smaller study populations to achieve accurate and representative data. Robinson recommended researchers should interview five to eight leaders from within each chosen study site. In this study, I triangulated data using the respective companies' documentation and policies for promoting healthy work environments, as well as prior academic literature defining toxic leadership (see Lewis, 2015).

Definitions

Corporate culture: Corporate culture is the underlying understanding in a business where certain behaviors, attitudes, and practices (be these positive or negative) are either valued or rejected (Belias & Koustelios, 2014).

Nontoxic leadership: Nontoxic leadership is classified as leaders who employ positive leadership and problem-solving behaviors such as transformational leadership to build up their employees (Breevaart et al., 2014).

Toxic leadership: Toxic leadership is classified as leaders who employ unproductive and potentially abusive, dysfunctional, and self-serving behaviors and personality traits, such as intimidation, bullying, manipulation, or overt or subversive

aggression, to force employees to follow the leaders' wishes (Mehta & Maheshwari, 2014).

Workplace toxicity (or toxic work environment): Workplace toxicity is the level to which bad behavior, such as discrimination, bullying, coworker incivility, or other negatives, are experienced in a work environment that can lead to increased levels of work-related stress and anxiety (Laschinger, Wong, Cummings, & Grau, 2014).

Assumptions

There were assumptions regarding this study. Locke, Spirduso, and Silverman (2014) defined an assumption as anything in a study that a researcher could logically expect as true but had not been so proven. I assumed participants were honest and forthcoming in their interviews. I based this assumption on how this study could benefit the site companies, as well as similar institutions, if participants saw the value in offering detailed, clear, and honest responses. By collecting more information about toxic leadership and strategies used to alleviate the effects of such leadership, companies could become better informed as to how to mitigate toxic attitudes and behaviors in workplace environments. I assumed that the sites' leaders interviewed reflected nontoxic leadership in workplace environments. I based this assumption on the companies' positive public reputation, general reports of worker satisfaction gained through the researcher's direct exposure to employees, and generally increasing profits.

Finally, I assumed that researcher bias might be evident in this study, especially during the data collection and analysis phases. I was directly involved in or had access to the site companies, which might influence leaders' responses during interviews. In

addition, my knowledge related to leadership styles and behavior could influence responses or data analysis. While researcher bias could never be completely eradicated (Chenail, 2011), I made various provisions for limiting this issue. I followed an interview protocol for every interview conducted. I used the interview protocol to ask the same questions of each participant, avoid potential leading questions, and ensure the interviews stayed on topic (see Leung, 2015). I mitigated bias by utilizing data analysis software, thereby limiting personal interpretation of data, along with audio-recording all interviews and using data triangulation (see Leung, 2015).

Scope and Delimitations

This study's scope was limited to 10 leaders from two government and nongovernment institutions based in New Hampshire. I used a purposive sampling technique to gain participants (Eiken et al., 2016). The inclusion criteria were the following: Participants had to have worked in their leadership capacity at their firm for at least five years, and participants must have had previous experience in a toxic work environment, either as an employee under a toxic leader or as a nontoxic leader entering into and needing to fix a toxic work environment. I was not concerned with employee perceptions or stories on leadership styles and behavior regarding toxic/nontoxic work environments. I excluded employees to address the identified research gap related to leaders' stories, choices, and application of nontoxic leadership styles and behavior regarding mitigating toxic work environments.

This study was based on the workplace environment of two specific companies, one that is governmental and one that is nongovernmental in nature. Because this study

was extremely specific to the present environment, the results of the study were not intended to be generalizable. In qualitative research, researchers do not usually aim to develop results that are generalizable (Leung, 2015). Despite this issue, the results may prove informative for other professionals operating in a toxic environment and seeking information on how to alleviate the toxicity. I chose these sites because both companies were identified as nontoxic work environments, with leaders who practiced positive leadership styles and behaviors. By interviewing participants who actively worked in and promoted nontoxicity in the workplace, I aimed to develop an overall clearer understanding of the strategies that assured these workplaces remained nontoxic through leaders' particular strategies.

Based on purposive sampling, I identified participants who had experienced previous toxic work environment and leadership experiences. These experiences allowed participants to compare their current nontoxic and previous toxic environments and leaders, as well as reveal their strategies for overcoming previous toxicity and avoiding toxicity in their current location. I chose these sites due to having personal, direct, and easy access to the firms and leaders, making gathering data simpler and more efficient (Robinson, 2014). Only topics related to leadership style, behavior, and toxic/nontoxic work environments were included in the interviews. I aimed to narrow the gap in the research related to mitigating toxic work environments through leader impact from leaders' perspectives. I asked participants open-ended questions in semistructured interviews where they could expound fully on aspects of leadership style and behavior in regard to mitigating toxicity in the workplace. A better understanding of the issue of

nontoxic leadership might assist in providing leaders with alternative approaches to prevent or counteract both toxic leadership styles and toxic work environments. Data were collected via semistructured, in-depth interviews that provided opportunities for participants to develop statements fully and fill in their personal stories while ensuring the interview stayed on topic.

Limitations

This study was limited by a small sample size, aligned with sample sizes used in qualitative narrative designs (see Lewis, 2015). Qualitative narrative designs require lengthy interview and data collection processes, making larger sample population sizes impractical (Lewis, 2015; Robinson, 2014). The study included the stories of leaders from two sites in New Hampshire. Hence, the findings could not be generalized to other companies or leaders either in New Hampshire or other states. The research was also limited in design, as quantitative data were not collected to substantiate findings. Future research consisting of employee participants, other companies in varied areas, and different research designs might assist in countering these specific study limitations.

This study was also limited by potential bias. To mitigate bias, I used an evaluated and piloted interview protocol to guide the interviews (see Flick, 2014; Leung, 2015). I also used data triangulation (see Leung, 2015). I provided all participants with an informed consent form detailing the study, processes, value of participants' honest contributions, and how no negative repercussions would occur for participants (see Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I discuss further details regarding these aspects in Chapter 3.

Significance of the Study

Toxic leaders can have a negative influence on employee performance, health and wellbeing, and the overall work environment (Hadadian & Zarei, 2016; Mehta & Maheshwari, 2014). Researchers should find ways to mitigate toxic leadership to create better and more productive places of employment (see Belias & Koustelios, 2014; Bell, 2017). By developing a deeper understanding about how leaders selected and applied specific strategies and behaviors in toxic workplaces to improve the condition of the environment, I provided information that might prove advantageous for other companies experiencing challenges with toxic leadership and, consequently, a toxic workplace environment. This study might add to theory and practice with findings that others might use to develop positive social change.

Significance to Theory

This study had a significance to theory. I addressed the existing gap in the literature regarding how specific leadership approaches and behaviors (i.e., leaders' attempts and perspectives) influenced and potentially minimized toxicity in the workplace. In this area, researchers have often focused on effects stemming from destructive leaders, rather than how leaders can influence existing workplace toxicity through their (positive) behaviors (Cotton, 2016; Field, 2014; Graham, Harvey, Popadak, & Rajgopal, 2017). Prior researchers have focused on the subordinates regarding workplace and leader toxicity rather than the leaders, with little to no research on leaders' reasoning for their chosen leadership styles and behavior (Cotton, 2016; Jain & Kaur, 2014; Mathieu et al., 2014). I studied these issues from leaders' stories to focus on their

personal choices regarding style and behavior, which might advance scientific knowledge and fill in these gaps in literature.

The combined use of Alvarado's (2016) AWEST and Fraher's (2016) toxic triangle as the theoretical framework for this study could further contribute to theory. In this case, I expanded these concepts and applied these as measures to show what toxic leadership and behaviors were not. By utilizing this framework as an understanding of what toxic leadership and behaviors entail, I identified positive and nontoxic leadership and behavioral attributes. In this way, the AWEST and toxic triangle concepts were given further credence and validity through this study, and these were extended to study not only toxic leadership and behavior but also nontoxic leadership and behavior (see Leung, 2015).

Significance to Practice

Findings from this research also held significance to practice because the study could be used to influence company policy and leadership practices. By finding ways in which leaders of the study sites have successfully chosen and applied nontoxic leadership styles and behaviors, leaders in other companies could apply similar strategies, choices, and approaches in those contexts. In identifying findings related to applying alternative, positive leadership (as opposed to toxic leadership), leaders could mitigate current or future workplace toxicity. Based on the study findings, leaders might or might not be aware of specific strategies and approaches that could be used to mitigate workplace toxicity. Insights from this study might also help companies avoid lawsuits, improve low

productivity levels, and reduce high staff turnover due to toxic workplace elements left unattended or ineffectively managed by workplace leaders.

Significance to Social Change

The study may also contribute to positive social change by generating practical models of and suggestions for creating a less toxic work environment. Lowering workplace toxicity may create a healthier and happier workforce, which can lead to increased public wellbeing and company success (Pradhan & Pradhan, 2015). Not only can positive leadership improve worker productivity and wellbeing, but it may also improve economic conditions, as well as the mental and emotional health of citizens (Belias & Koustelios, 2014; Sun et al., 2016). Collectively, this study can yield increased productivity for the companies that have and maintain nontoxic workplace environments (see Anjum et al., 2018). Insights from this study can help inform workplace leaders about ways to choose leadership styles and behaviors designed to decrease workplace toxicity, thereby helping them avoid leadership styles and behaviors that make workplace toxicity worse (see Moore, Coe, Adams, Conlon, & Sargeant, 2015). Such insight may lead to leaders' improved wellbeing, thereby further positively influencing company dynamics and the larger society.

Summary

I discussed details regarding the issue of toxic leadership, ways toxic leadership could influence or create toxic work environments, and the effects of such toxicity on employees in this chapter. Researchers have explored ways leadership can either mitigate or instigate workplace toxicity (Cotton, 2016; Field, 2014; Graham et al., 2017).

Researchers have shown a need to identify positive leadership styles and behaviors further (Breevaart et al., 2014; Pradhan & Pradhan, 2015; Tse & Chiu, 2014). Researchers have also indicated a research gap related to leaders' perspectives around toxic leadership and workplaces (Cotton, 2016; Jain & Kaur, 2014; Mathieu et al., 2014). I examined the influence of nontoxic leadership on mitigating such toxicity. The purpose of this qualitative narrative case study was to develop a deeper understanding of how leaders selected and applied specific strategies and behaviors in nontoxic workplace environments. The reason for the selection of nontoxic workplace environments was because the strategies that have proven effective in these settings may provide insight as to effective ways to circumvent the presence of a toxic workplace environment. This study was focused on a population of government and nongovernment institutions in the state of New Hampshire.

Chapter 1 was an introduction to the study. Chapter 2 contains information related to the chosen conceptual framework, as well as a literature review and the processes involved in conducting such research. These will relate to aspects of leadership and toxic work environments.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Toxic leadership can negatively influence worker well-being and productivity (Alvarado, 2016; Cheang & Applebaum, 2015; Field, 2014). This issue can lead to higher levels of worker anxiety and increased incidences of worker ill-health and result in a negative reputation and lower profits for businesses where toxic leadership occurs (Dellasega, Volpe, Edmonson, & Hopkins, 2014; Galupo & Resnick, 2016; Harder, Wagner, & Rash, 2015; O'Hara, 2015). Positive or nontoxic leadership can lessen toxicity in work environments, and leadership style and behavior can play a major role in worker satisfaction, well-being, and productivity (Day et al., 2014; Hogan & Coote, 2014; Pradhan & Pradhan, 2015; Tse & Chiu, 2014).

To mitigate the kinds of negatives associated with toxic leadership and establish better leadership behaviors to improve worker well-being, researchers must understand nontoxic leadership and ways positive leadership can improve toxic environments (Sun et al., 2016; Tse & Chiu, 2014). Positive leadership may benefit business leaders and employees by increasing worker productivity, health, and general worker wellbeing, and by improving business reputations (Dul & Ceylan, 2014; Tsai, Horng, Liu, & Hu, 2015). Researchers have yet to conduct studies about employee and leader perspectives on how specific leadership approaches and behaviors have influenced workplace toxicity (Cotton, 2016; Field, 2014; Graham et al., 2017).

Cotton (2016) noted that workers experienced higher levels of anxiety when faced with toxic leadership, and they often chose unproductive or ineffective means for dealing

with such leadership. Cotton noted that toxic leadership had been studied from the worker's perspective and that future research into how to counter toxic leadership by understanding leaders' perspectives remained necessary. This suggestion substantiated Field's (2014) earlier findings that leaders could negatively influence the psychological well-being of their workers.

Research existed regarding different leadership styles, such as toxic, transformational, transactional, and so forth (Breevaart et al., 2014; O'Hara, 2015; Rego, Sousa, Marques, & Pina e Cunha, 2014). However, it did not focus on how or why leaders chose the styles and behaviors that they did or how they perceived such styles influenced workers and the work environment. I provided findings related to such gaps. The purpose of this qualitative narrative case study was to develop a deeper understanding of how leaders selected and applied specific strategies and behaviors within nontoxic workplace environments. I chose to study nontoxic workplace environments because the leaders who head these institutions can describe the strategies they use and have used to circumvent the development of a toxic workplace environment. These leaders could provide the techniques they used to mitigate circumstances that might have given rise to a toxic workplace environment. This study was focused on a population of leaders from two institutions, one government and one nongovernment, in the state of New Hampshire. They provided insights and examples about what constituted nontoxic leadership, thereby providing alternative leadership strategies to toxic leader environments. Findings from this study could assist leaders in choosing appropriate leadership styles to lower workplace toxicity or avoid creating it.

To understand nontoxic leadership and how to avoid toxic leadership better, I conducted a comprehensive literature review. The rest of this chapter includes the search strategy and theoretical foundation from which I sourced and analyzed literature. The chapter also includes discussions on the most relevant literature, divided into the following subsections: the toxic triangle, factors and behaviors that contribute to workplace toxicity, leadership's influence on mitigating workplace toxicity, and ways to avoid toxic leadership and promote nontoxic leadership behavior. The chapter ends with a summary of the main points, key findings, and any gaps in the literature.

Literature Search Strategy

To gather relevant literature for this review, I searched databases such as EBSCOhost, ERIC, and Google Scholar. To find relevant articles, I used key search terms and combination phrases such as *toxic leadership, nontoxic/positive leadership, leadership behavior, influence, leadership style, toxic workplace/work environment, toxic/complicit followers, toxic triangle, worker well-being,* and *coping with a toxic work environment.* Ninety-four percent of the articles referenced in this literature review were written between 2014 and 2017 to ensure that conclusions drawn from the literature remained relevant to the current workplace and leadership toxicity. The remaining 6% were written before 2014, and these consisted of seminal works relevant to the study.

Conceptual Foundation

The conceptual framework was Alvarado's (2016) triangular model of workplace toxicity. Alvarado posited this three-part model to explain the associations between toxic work environments, toxic subordinates, and toxic leadership. To create this model,

Alvarado (2016) surveyed 280 workers from one physical workspace. Each participant had to work in this area for at least two years to answer questions about workplace toxicity effectively.

Through this study, Alvarado (2016) found four factors that contributed to workplace toxicity, perceived threat, favoritism, bullying, and overall organizational climate. In other words, workplace toxicity was higher when workers believed that they would experience negative consequences like threats should they make mistakes, fail in some other way, or not fit into the general company dynamic, for example, female employees feeling threatened by male coworkers. Toxicity was higher when workers believed there was a social hierarchy or that some employees were more likely to receive benefit and promotions, while others were more likely to be ignored or threatened. Alvarado (2016) revealed that workers who experienced bullying, either from leaders or coworkers, were also more likely to rate their workplace as more toxic. Finally, if management did not address toxic behavior or if leaders actively took part in or promoted such behavior, the workplace culture or overall feel of the work environment would become toxic. In other words, if leaders accepted negative factors, such as discrimination or bullying as "just the way things are," or if workers did not feel that leaders took their complaints regarding toxic elements seriously, then a culture of toxicity would become the pattern in the work environment (Alvarado, 2016).

The four factors indicated an interplay between leaders and followers as well as followers and followers in the toxic workplace (Alvarado, 2016). The factors identified also led the author to refine the original model to focus on measuring perceived threat,

favoritism, bullying, and overall organizational climate to more thoroughly determine workplace toxicity. Through this refinement, Alvarado (2016) created the AWEST.

The AWEST could allow other researchers to more accurately determine workplace toxicity by measuring all three points of the toxic triangle (Alvarado, 2016), and the four factors could easily account for both leader and follower behavior and toxicity, as well as the overall toxicity of the corporate culture. The scale could better measure the interplay between these factors and the toxic triangle to see if, where, and how issues might arise and, in the process, be mitigated in the future (Alvarado, 2016). For example, if a company scored high in follower toxicity, it was likely that leadership and culture were involved in causing such toxicity directly or indirectly. Those wishing to address the issue could then approach rectification from not only a follower perspective, such as by training followers not to bully their coworkers, but also from a leadership and culture perspective, such as by training leaders how to better deal with coworker abuses or concerns, thereby establishing a healthier culture where bullying is not tolerated.

Alvarado (2016) explained that the triangular toxicity model could account for the complexities that contributed to destructive leadership. This model could also help to demystify why, if a single action is taken such as replacing an abusive leader, firing employees with attitude problems, or fixing detrimental aspects of company culture, toxicity may still exist in the workplace, due to the models' establishment of the interrelated nature or triangularity of workplace toxicity. Due to the comprehensive nature of this model and its ability to assist researchers in accurately measuring workplace toxicity according to four factors and across each of the three potentially toxic

areas, leadership, followers and corporate culture, I deemed the AWEST an appropriate model in which to frame this study.

The Toxic Triangle

The toxic triangle within the workplace consists of toxic leaders, toxic work environments, and toxic followers (Padilla et al., 2007). Authors have noted that each factor within the triangle can cause or perpetuate toxicity in all three aspects (Fraher, 2016; Leonard, 2014; Padilla et al., 2007). In other words, if leaders in the workplace demonstrate toxic leadership behaviors and styles, their toxicity can translate to unhappy or toxic workers, thereby leading to a toxic work environment where workers and leaders are unhappy, anxious, and less productive (Fraher, 2016). Similarly, if a generally positive leader steps into a toxic environment or must deal with negative or toxic workers, they may adapt their leadership style toward more toxic behaviors (Fraher, 2016), further perpetuating the cycle of toxicity. The following subsections show each factor within this triangle.

Toxic Leaders

Toxic leaders are the first factor involved when discussing workplace toxicity. This is due to leadership's role and responsibility in modeling desired behavior to followers, as well as establishing the kind of culture the business wishes to maintain (Eisenbeiß & Brodbeck, 2013). In other words, followers take their cues from leaders (Padilla et al., 2007). If a leader portrays toxic behavior, such as being unethical in their dealings or showing favoritism to some employees while bullying others, highly susceptible followers will begin to portray similar behaviors (Baronce, 2015; Eisenbeiß &

Brodbeck, 2013). For example, workers unwilling to behave unethically may then face marginalization or victimization by the followers and leaders promoting said behavior, or they will begin to withdraw from participating in the company (Hayes, Douglas, & Bonner, 2015; Jha & Jha, 2015).

Boddy (2015) found that workplace outcomes with a psychopathic CEO in charge included staff withdraw, higher turnover rates, and bullying. Such employee withdrawal or turnover may lead to lower creativity, productivity, and innovation in a company, thereby negatively influencing its profits and competitiveness in its industry (Boddy, 2015; Tsai et al., 2015). In addition, researchers have related employee withdrawal and turnover to the increased stress workers often experience when working with a toxic leader (Hadadian & Zarei, 2016). To deal with the anxiety caused by worrying about the erratic nature of their leader or needing to work harder due to incompetent leaders, workers can either opt to leave their current workplace entirely or stop putting in their best work to avoid additional exposure to their leader (Cotton, 2016; Hadadian & Zarei, 2016).

A leader can display toxicity in numerous ways. Hadadian and Zarei (2016), Green (2014), and Mathieu et al. (2014) found leaders with narcissistic qualities could develop toxicity in a workplace. Any leader who either uses their position for self-promotion to *save* the organization (through the overt or latent idea that their superior knowledge or abilities are the only way a company will succeed) or undermines others or the company can create a toxic work environment (Bell, 2017; Boddy, 2014; Cotton, 2016). While narcissism and self-promotion may not inherently constitute added stress

for workers, these elements are often combined with unpredictability, authoritarian leadership styles, and abusive supervision, all of which can lead to stress and anxiety, thereby creating a toxic work environment.

Leaders can be toxic if they are incompetent or unsuited for their job or leadership role (Green, 2014). In this case, workers who see their leaders' inabilities may lose respect for them, thereby undermining not only their leaders but also the organizational structure (Fischbacher-Smith, 2015). Workers may be angry at having to work under a toxic leader (Mathieu et al., 2014). Continued worker animosity toward their leaders can encourage a toxic work environment and can extend to workers' family and social circles if they cannot express their anger in a positive way in the work environment (Jha & Jha, 2015; Mathieu et al., 2014). Researchers have noted that unethical dealings, a lack of trust between leaders and workers, and a failure to consider worker wellbeing or concerns equated to toxic leadership (Eisenbeiß & Brodbeck, 2013; Maxwell, 2015; Mehta & Maheshwari, 2014).

Toxic leaders can negatively influence a worker's ability to think critically or effectively problem-solve (Bell, 2017). Toxic leaders who do not seek their followers' wellbeing and attempt to deal with problems in a healthy, effective manner cannot demonstrate such positive behavior for their workers to follow (Fischbacher-Smith, 2015; Jha & Jha, 2015). Workers subjected to toxic leadership may become afraid to voice their opinions or solutions due to potential backlash from their toxic leader (Peng, Schaubroeck, & Li, 2014). Leaders should attempt to counter such toxicity by providing workers with an environment where their voices will be heard and respected (Hewlett,

2016). The real or perceived leader backlash to voicing concerns or providing alternatives often derives from workers experiencing leaders authoritarian or taking a fundamentalist "my way or the highway" approach to projects and management (Cotton, 2016; Padilla et al., 2007). Such fear and lack of positive leader-member exchanges can also negatively influence overall department or company performance, as well as continue the toxic cycle in the workplace (Bell, 2017; Peng et al., 2014).

Leonard (2014) noted that the dynamic between leaders and their followers was critical in the toxicity of a work environment. Leaders with a *bad* relationship with their followers would perpetuate a toxic environment, while the converse was also true, where leaders with positive relationships with their followers perpetuated happier and healthier environments (Fischbacher-Smith, 2015; Leonard, 2014; Tse & Chiu, 2014). While unhealthy dynamics may first derive from workers, leaders who do not work to rectify worker negativity will encourage the toxic environment (Cotton, 2016; Moore et al., 2015). Leaders and future leaders must have training in ways in which to deal with toxic followers, alternatives to authoritarian leadership styles, and undo toxic cultures (Aarons, Ehrhart, Farahnak, & Hurlburt, 2015). Such training will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

Toxic leadership can be unintentional or can arise from good intentions (Cotton, 2016; Fraher, 2016). Leaders may enter a struggling department and wish to fix the issues swiftly by employing specific skills and knowledge, or leaders may work in a high-stress environment that requires immediate and decisive action, which can lead to relying on their abilities before wasting time incorporating their workers in the situation (Cotton,

2016; Fraher, 2016). In these cases, the toxic leader wishes to provide aid; in the process, they unwittingly undermine their workers (Fraher, 2016). Prolonged undermining may then lead to worker resentment or withdrawal, thereby perpetuating a cycle of workplace toxicity (Fischbacher-Smith, 2015; Mehta & Maheshwari, 2014).

Toxic leadership can also be found in any organization and across any culture or another demographic factor (Eisenbeiß & Brodbeck, 2013; Schmidt, 2014; Woestman & Wasonga, 2015). Woestman and Wasonga (2015) found that toxic leadership was often evident in schools and across different levels of school leadership, like principals, department heads and school governing bodies.. In particular, toxic leadership behavior, such as discrimination and aggression, was demonstrated in the principal-teacher dynamic, especially relating to principals, who were predominantly male and their female staff (Woestman & Wasonga, 2015). This finding showed instances of microaggression perpetrated at the leader-worker level, which could lead to both increased worker distress and a company culture of acceptance of microaggression (Basford, Offermann, & Behrend, 2014). Microaggression will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

Schmidt (2014) also highlighted ways in which the military often reported cases of toxic leadership. Much of toxic leadership, such as abusive supervision and authoritarian leadership styles, derives from the idea of breaking and building soldiers in the military leadership context (Wright, 2015). Schmidt (2014) highlighted how military personnel in both low-stress like home life and high stress or active combat situations were still negatively influenced by toxic leadership through high degrees of personal stress, lack of group cohesion and trust, and overall lower levels of job satisfaction. These

findings indicated the idea that toxic leadership was influenced by organizational culture and workers (O'Hara, 2015). One should strategize to mitigate the negative effects of toxic leadership, thereby building stronger, more competitive companies, with a healthy and productive workforce (Jha & Jha, 2015; Schmidt, 2014).

Toxic Work Environments

The toxic workplace is the second point of interest in the toxic triangle. In the same way that toxic leadership can promote a toxic environment, so too can a toxic environment lead to toxic leaders and followers (Alvarado, 2016; Padilla et al., 2007). A toxic workplace has various factors that are characterized as being both destructive and ineffective workspaces for employees (Field, 2014). Often, they are a product of toxic people, like leaders and/or followers who are negative about their jobs, have aggressive or anti-social personalities, or who are ineffective at proactive problem-solving, or toxic contexts, such as naturally high-risk or high-stress work environments, like policing, nursing, or the military (Jones & Williams, 2013; Schmidt, 2014; Zhang et al., 2014).

These factors need not automatically translate into toxic environments; the long-term exposure to such factors or the inadequate dealing with issues related to such factors can cause environments to become toxic (Field, 2014; Moore et al., 2015). For example, soldiers may exhibit higher levels of inter-relational aggression with their colleagues due to factors, such as post-traumatic stress or mistrust (Schmidt, 2014). Whatever the case may be, negative worker behavior or attitudes must be dealt with timeously and efficiently through the provision of therapeutic assistance, training, and interpersonal conflict resolution and problem-solving strategies (Moore et al., 2015).

Dellasega et al. (2014); Zhang et al. (2014); Park, Cho, and Hong (2014); Laschinger et al. (2014); and Hayes et al. (2015) found that nurses often faced leader and/or coworker violence and incivility, higher levels of stress and burnout, and reported higher levels of desire to leave their place of employment. Nurses' experiences of violence and incivility were partly due to the often unspoken but well-understood internal hospital hierarchy, where doctors and nursing leaders were seen as superior to nursing staff (Laschinger et al., 2014; Park et al., 2014). This hierarchy often led to dismissive and aggressive behavior toward nursing individuals, including verbal abuse and bullying (Park et al., 2014). Such aggressions and hierarchy made it harder for nurses to confront issues of violence or discrimination, leading to a silence that sustained the toxic environment (Laschinger et al., 2014). Dellasega et al. (2014) pointed out there might not be many aggressive individuals in an organization for a toxic work environment to occur. Instead, the moment a lack of recourse for followers or victims occurred or a reactionary, rather than a preventative approach to dealing with issues, even one aggressor can be enough to harm an entire department or organization (Laschinger et al., 2014).

Moore et al. (2015) had similar findings, noting that toxic work environments derived from toxic attitudes remaining unaddressed or escalating conflicts being ignored. In other words, leaders and organizations wishing to undo toxic environments need to provide their workers with opportunities to voice their grievances and concerns, address individual worker bad behaviors and attitudes as quickly as possible, and have clear and uniform consequences for perpetrators of aggression (Laschinger et al., 2014). In

addition, organization leaders should attempt to ensure the mental, emotional, and physical well-being and safety of their employees (Hayes et al., 2015).

Linton et al. (2015) noted how work stress and lower employee well-being in the workplace could lead to sleep disturbances for such employees. Even after removing themselves from a toxic environment, workers could struggle to regain their wellbeing, suffer from sleep disturbances that could compound stress, and report higher levels of home life conflict (Linton et al., 2015; Mathieu et al., 2014). Communication can play a key role in such mitigation (Moore et al., 2015).

Leaders need not only address issues of worker wellbeing once a toxic situation has developed or is negatively influencing the worker(s) involved (Harder et al., 2015). Again, it takes time for workplace toxicity to occur (Jain & Kaur, 2014). Organization leaders should attempt to set provisions for dealing with potential toxic situations, like incompetent leadership or aggressive coworkers, before issues arise (Laschinger et al., 2014). Such provisions at the leader and organizational levels will increase worker trust in the organization and leaders themselves. Issues will be dealt with and their wellbeing restored, which can translate to happier, more innovative workers who display increased propensities toward organizational loyalty (Brown, Crossley, & Robinson, 2014).

The organization or respective leaders should not be the only ones responsible for dealing with potentially toxic issues that may escalate to the point of creating a toxic workplace (Tsai et al., 2015). Workers should also be responsible for their behaviors, particularly regarding how prepared they are to partake in active knowledge sharing or how territorial they may behave toward their coworkers when involved in projects

(Brown et al., 2014; Tsai et al., 2015). The more willing employees are to work with, rather than against their co-workers and leaders, and the more trust they build with one another, the lower the chances will be for toxicity to pervade the workspace (Brown et al., 2014; Tsai et al., 2015). Organization leaders should provide followers with the skills, knowledge, and training to problem-solve inter-coworker conflicts and misunderstandings to perform their jobs optimally to lessen general workspace stress (Moore et al., 2015).

By allowing workers to deal with issues internally, providing necessary skills training and organizational recourse for toxic behavior, and promoting a culture void of toxicity, companies' leaders can reap the rewards of more productive, loyal, and innovative employees (Harder et al., 2015; Jain & Kaur, 2014; Zhang et al., 2014). Dul and Ceylan (2014) also found that developing a positive work environment that focused on promoting creativity and provided a flexible work environment often led to increased levels of worker productivity and innovation. Dul and Ceylan emphasized that leaders played a key role in how such an environment could be created and sustained. From the research reviewed in this section, an interrelated nature occurred between leader-worker-environment in how toxic workplaces developed. The same dynamic applied to how effective organization leaders were at countering workplace toxicity.

Toxic Followers

The final point in the toxic triangle is that of toxic followers. The literature, reviewed in the previous two subsections, already indicated ways in which workers played a key role in workplace toxicity—through emulating toxic leaders' behavior,

withdrawing, or behaving badly toward their colleagues (Baronce, 2015; Brown et al., 2014; Eisenbeiß & Brodbeck, 2013; Jha & Jha, 2015). Workers can assist in lowering workplace toxicity through contributing actively in their jobs, sharing knowledge, and promoting a positive and creative work atmosphere (Brown et al., 2014; Tsai et al., 2015).

Eisenbeiß and Brodbeck (2013) and Mowchan, Lowe, and Reckers (2015) found that followers subjected to unethical leadership were more likely to take part in or intend to take part in their unethical dealings in the work environment. This finding was true for workers who experienced low authoritarianism and high impulsivity in themselves and their leaders (Mowchan et al., 2015). Conversely, followers with higher levels of resistance to taking part in or intending to take part in unethical behavior tended to demonstrate higher levels of personal authoritarianism and proactiveness (Mowchan et al., 2015).

Follower personality tended to play an important part in how toxic a work environment was (Padilla et al., 2007; Uhl-Bien, Riggio, Lowe, & Carsten, 2014). Followers, who were easily manipulated or more susceptible to toxic leaders, tended to either take on similar traits and attitudes (Baronce, 2015). Such followers would buy into the toxic work culture and further the toxic cycle (Baronce, 2015). Conversely, followers with less pliable personalities could either counter toxicity through their positive behaviors or intentionally or unintentionally contribute to toxicity by disagreeing with toxic leaders and coworkers in an environment. Their voices were not appreciated, so they could choose to withdraw and, in the process, stop giving their best during work

hours (Hayes et al., 2015; Hewlett, 2016). Nontoxic followers should learn how to deal with toxic individuals in productive ways to maintain their wellbeing, assist others in maintaining theirs and positively contribute to the company as a whole (Fraher, 2016; Holder & Nadal, 2016). I did not focus on this particular area, as I focused on leadership. This area is important to note, because, as stated, toxic individuals have the ability to negatively influence nontoxic workers. Future researchers might wish to study the kinds of training, skills and coping mechanisms that nontoxic employees could adapt to counter toxic leadership and work environments.

Uhl-Bien et al. (2014) provided two potential frameworks in which to study follower dynamics. These were focused on understanding followers regarding either their roles in a company and different leader-follower dynamics or through how leaders could better incorporate their followers into the leadership process (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). Understanding the leader-follower dynamic is also important in providing ways for avoiding and addressing leaders' potential abuse of power (Reiley & Jacobs, 2016).

Toxic leadership can often occur due to the inherent power dynamic and imbalance between workers and leaders (Collinson & Tourish, 2015). Toxic leaders tend to abuse this power dynamic for self-gain, often using fear, intimidation, favoritism, and other strategies above to manipulate and control their followers (Mehta & Maheshwari, 2014; Starr-Glass, 2017). Followers may then employ similar strategies toward their subordinates or coworkers, either as a coping mechanism for dealing with their toxic leader. For instance, this perception may entail the fear that a leader may verbally abuse a worker if he or she does not complete a project on time, so the worker will verbally abuse

his or her coworkers if they do not complete their section of the project in a timely manner. This may also entail the perception that if a worker is permitted to verbally abuse his or her colleagues, so he or she will do whatever is deemed necessary to control the colleagues, exhibiting toxic behaviors (McKee, Waples, & Tullis, 2017; Padilla et al., 2007).

Toxic followers often seek out toxic leaders to ensure a continued environment of toxicity that feeds into their toxic desires of self-promotion or narcissism (Fischbacher-Smith, 2015; Padilla et al., 2007). This dynamic, relating to maladaptive personalities, will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter. Workers who do not thrive under toxic leaders due to their own nontoxicity or are not susceptible or willing to change their behavior to placate toxic leaders or coworkers will exhibit higher levels of stress, lower productivity, and higher instances of conflict family or social circles (Jha & Jha, 2015; Mathieu et al. 2014). Even these nontoxic workers become part of the toxic cycle, rather than breaking the environment of toxicity in the workplace (Baronce, 2015). Reiley and Jacobs (2016) noted that such follower behavior occurred regarding their opinions of their leaders' ethics.

From the literature related to the toxic triangle, toxic leaders, toxic environments, and toxic followers all play an interrelated role in workplace toxicity development, continuation, and counteraction (Erickson et al., 2017; Padilla et al., 2007). Leaders play an important role in workplace toxicity. Not only do leaders dictate the atmosphere of the work environment through their leadership style, like authoritarian versus transformational), but they also provide an indication to their subordinates about what is

acceptable and unacceptable in their departments or the larger organization (Fraher, 2016; Starr-Glass, 2017). In other words, if leaders act in unethical ways, commit micro-aggressions, show favoritism, or demonstrate any other behavior or attitudes, either their followers will begin exhibiting the same traits and attitudes, or they will suffer increased levels of stress due to the need to counteract such negatives (Alvarado, 2016; Eisenbeiß & Brodbeck, 2013; Mehta & Maheshwari, 2014).

Leaders who do not effectively address toxic situations, even when they may not be toxic leaders, contribute to a toxic environment (Cotton, 2016; Field, 2014; Fischbacher-Smith, 2015). By not dealing with a toxic employee, addressing employee concerns about such issues as discrimination, or approaching issues from a reactive rather than preventative angle, leaders may lose their employees' trust. Leaders may allow toxicity to fester, making it harder to undo, and add to the toxic environment (Cotton, 2016; Field, 2014; Fischbacher-Smith, 2015). To counter the toxic triangle and resultant toxic work environment, leaders should understand what constitutes a nontoxic leadership and how one can apply such leadership. This study assisted in this regard. While leaders were not solely responsible for workplace toxicity, and future researchers might wish to address toxicity regarding workers and the work environment, I provided at least some clarity and practical insights into ways in which leadership could mitigate workplace toxicity.

Factors and Behaviors That Contribute to Workplace Toxicity

Certain factors and behaviors can contribute to toxic workplaces. These include micro-aggressions, like bullying or discrimination and maladjusted personality types,

where leaders and/or employees have personality clashes or do not practice healthy problem-solving or anger management (Guenole, 2014; Mizzi, 2017). The corporate culture of a specific business can further contribute or mitigate to workplace toxicity (Guiso, Sapienza, & Zingales, 2015). For example, businesses with an underlying *bro culture*, which is where latent or overt beliefs and practices highlight the value of heterosexual men, while discriminating against women or those with other sexual orientations, may find it more likely that individual employees who do not fit into this culture experience bullying, ostracization, being passed over for promotion, or similar negative micro-aggressions (Basford et al., 2014; Burton, 2015; Nadal et al., 2014).

Conversely, leaders of businesses with a culture of diversity, tolerance and healthy problem-solving who swiftly and meaningfully address behaviors counter to this bullying type of culture may report higher levels of general employee wellbeing and productivity (Belias & Koustelios, 2014; Guiso et al., 2015; Mizzi, 2017). Each of these factors, namely micro-aggressions, maladjusted personality types and corporate culture, are discussed in more detail in the following subsections.

Microaggressions

Researchers have defined microaggressions as any underlying, systemic, or overt nonphysical aggression toward individuals or groups (Dzurec & Albataineh, 2014; Mizzi, 2017). Microaggression is often harder to identify and harder to mitigate compared to blatant and intentional discrimination (Holder & Nadal, 2016). This aspect is due to how microaggression often stems from beliefs and behaviors that have been cultivated over time in society itself (Mizzi, 2017). Examples of microaggressions include racial, age, or

gender discrimination, where negative beliefs, like women being inferior to men or older people having nothing to offer a modern world, are perpetuated (Appannah & Biggs, 2015; Mizzi, 2017; Torres & Taknint, 2015). When people perpetuate micro-aggressions in the workplace, these become acceptable in organizational culture and are not dealt with appropriately. These micro-aggressions can lead to toxic work environments, especially for those against whom these micro-aggressions are practiced (Basford et al., 2014; Starr-Glass, 2017).

Toxic leaders are often at the forefront of micro-aggressions, where they use their power and standing within their departments or companies to abuse those workers who do not fit into their paradigm directly or more subtly (Burns, 2017). Dzurec and Albataineh (2014) found that toxic leaders and other workplace bullies often used subtle means of undermining their victim's personhood through an aggressive yet seemingly innocent use of language, tone, or nonverbal cues. Basford et al. (2014) also highlighted how increased attention on discrimination and attempts at removing such people from the workplace had often led to perpetrators adopting less obvious but equally harmful methods for abusing their victims, like framing sexual harassment in the form of a joke. Such subversive practices provide victims with little recourse and can work to silence them, as they have no real evidence on which to base the claims of harassment, bullying, or discrimination (Dzurec & Albataineh, 2014).

In the workplace, women often deal with issues of sexism, being passed over for promotion in favor of their male counterparts, and sexual harassment (Basford et al., 2014; Woestman & Wasonga, 2015). In their study of perceptions around discrimination

in the workplace, Basford et al. (2014) found that female undergraduate students perceived greater degrees of discrimination in comparison to male participants. Holder et al. (2015) found that African American women suffered higher degrees of microaggression due to their race and gender. Similarly, Burton (2015) found an underrepresentation of women in certain fields and industries, such as sport, which perpetuated ideas of discrimination and resulted in those women working in such areas to be left with little to no recourse against microaggression.

Women are not the sole victims of microaggression in the workplace. Individuals in the LGBTQ community have similarly reported instances of discrimination (Galupo & Resnick, 2016; Nadal et al., 2014). In their 2016 study, Galupo and Resnick found that approximately 42% of homosexual employees felt they had been discriminated against, while 90% of transgender employees experienced discrimination or harassment in the workplace. Nadal et al. (2014) had similar findings, with transgender employees experiencing increased levels of discrimination, which affected their emotional, cognitive and behavioral actions or ways of dealing with said microaggression. In addition, Jones and Williams (2013) found that members of the LGBTQ community faced increased instances of microaggression when working in fields such as policing. Here, microaggression would be practiced in approaches to training, how and where the discriminated against parties would be deployed, and their decreased chances of being promoted (Jones & Williams, 2013).

Shenoy-Packer (2015) found that microaggressions were based on the victims' ethnicities and nationalities. Holder and Nadal (2016) extended such microaggression to

include other identifying factors of the victims, including socio-economic status, religion, and so forth. Torres and Taknint (2015) noted how Latino employees had to deal with microaggression. Torres and Taknint noted how this particular group often dealt with increased levels of workplace discrimination and aggression, and they reported resultant higher levels of anxiety and work-related stress due to such experiences. Jones and Williams (2013) and Holder et al. (2015) had similar findings regarding ways in which African Americans, particularly African American women, were more likely to experience instances of microaggression relating to their employment, like fewer promotions and higher levels of sexual harassment, compared to their White counterparts.

Researchers have found that, regardless of what type of microaggression was experienced, like gender-based and racially-targeted aggression, victims would often respond in similar ways (Basford et al., 2014; Hayes et al., 2015; Jha & Jha, 2015; Nadal et al., 2014). For example, Holder et al. (2015) found that African American women who experienced discrimination might need to defer to personal support structures or other outside-company aids, or they would opt for self-preservation techniques, such as armoring or shifting, to avoid microaggression or psychologically steel themselves against future occurrences. Those experiencing racial-based microaggression would self-blame, rationalize and use self-protection strategies, such as creating alternative selves, (Shenoy-Packer, 2015). In a sense, victims of microaggression tended to employ similar coping strategies as those workers who experienced toxic leadership. These employees would also demonstrate a higher likelihood to leave their place of employment and withdraw from active participation (Hayes et al., 2015; Jha & Jha, 2015). These kinds of

coping mechanisms are not conducive to work wellbeing or organizational success, as workers who constantly have to gauge their actions, language, or selves to avoid discrimination or abuse cannot work effectively, be open or creative and will be unlikely to work at their best (Basford et al., 2014; Nadal et al., 2014).

Microaggression can harm individuals' emotional and psychological well-being (Holder & Nadal, 2016; Torres & Taknint, 2015). Prolonged exposure to microaggression can lead to not only a corporate culture condoning microaggression, but also cause a cycle of such toxic workplace behavior. Workers may begin to distrust their work environment and leaders, as well as feel they have little to no support or recourse for microaggression acts perpetrated against them (Brown et al., 2014; Holder & Nadal, 2016; Laschinger et al., 2014). As with other factors related to the creation of a toxic work environment, the longer organization leaders take to deal with matters of microaggression and the fewer effective options workers have or perceive available to them for constructive recourse, the more likely micro-aggressions will cause toxicity in the workplace (Burns, 2017; Laschinger et al., 2014). Leaders may have to deal with consequent worker-related issues, such as depression and high employee turnover, which can negatively influence their competitiveness in their respective industries (Mizzi, 2017; Torres & Taknint, 2015). Leaders of organizations must know of micro-aggressions in the workplace to find proactive means of dealing with such before it negatively influences their workers' wellbeing and overall company (Basford et al., 2014; Boddy, 2015; Tsai et al., 2015). I provided insight into how leaders could successfully address such issues.

Maladjusted Personality Types

Maladjusted personalities are individuals who present with personality traits that can be deemed anti-social (Spain, Harms, & LeBreton, 2014). Such personality types include narcissists, psychopaths and similar personality disorders (Guenole, 2014; Race, 2017). Individuals with these types of personalities tend to have little self-awareness, care little for how their actions and behaviors affect others and are good at manipulating individuals and situations for their benefit (McKee et al., 2017; Race, 2017).

Boddy (2014) found that corporate psychopaths were effective at bullying and manipulating their coworkers and subordinates, often thriving off conflict and negatively influencing employee wellbeing. These findings substantiated Hodson, Roscigno, and Lopez's (2006) earlier findings that toxic or maladaptive leaders used chaos and abused their power to gain success in an organization. Guenole (2014) had similar assertions, highlighting how maladaptive leaders were often detached from their employees and wellbeing. The author highlighted that these individuals tended to exhibit high levels of negative emotionality, contention with others, disregard for social norms, repeated negative actions, or being overly demanding; and aggression (Guenole, 2014). In other words, maladaptive personalities will often behave erratically, aggressively, or even play the victim to either get their way or shift responsibility or blame to others (Boddy, 2014; Mathieu et al., 2014).

Researchers have also found that toxic leadership often correlates or coincides with maladaptive or dark personality traits (Kaiser, LeBreton, & Hogan, 2015; Mathieu et al., 2014). In other words, when toxic leadership is experienced in the workplace, the

toxic leader may present with personality traits, such as psychopathy or narcissism (Kaiser et al., 2015). Schyns (2015) suggested that this correlation might be due to maladaptive personalities, such as psychopaths, often being more drawn to positions of power than those not found in leadership positions. Spain et al. (2014) noted that many studies remained necessary regarding how maladaptive personalities could affect normal personalities and work environments. The authors asserted that training and personality assessments should be included as part of the organizations' employee selection, promotion, or hiring processes to minimize the likelihood of maladaptive personalities entering leadership positions (Spain et al., 2014). Cheang and Applebaum (2015) reiterated this sentiment, noting that identifying leaders and future leaders' potential maladaptive personalities were key in reducing the number of toxic leaders in an organization.

Such identification is important in light of maladaptive individuals often being highly capable of manipulating how others perceive them, presenting as highly likable and good workers with strong leadership qualities before and even upon entering positions of power (Grijalva & Harms, 2013). In addition, Sosik, Chun, and Zhu (2014) noted that, especially narcissists, tended to be charismatic, which often empowered their followers and gained them popularity. Should darker personality traits be moderate, rather than strong, in an individual, their positive attributes, such as charisma or work ethic, might provide workers and organizations with benefits, as opposed to toxicity (Sosik et al., 2014). This variance makes it even more important for organizations to

distinguish between constructive, destructive maladaptive personalities and potential leaders' predisposition for abusive behaviors (Keller Hansborough & Jones, 2014).

Organization leaders should consider the followers' abilities to deal with maladaptive personalities; their potential for susceptibility to factors, such as manipulation; and their likelihood of promoting or even desiring to be led by dark leaders (McKee et al., 2017; Race, 2017). Maladaptive personalities seek out others (McKee et al., 2017), while followers who are willing to be led by maladaptive leaders may exhibit maladaptive personality traits (McKee et al., 2017). Toxicity breeds toxicity through leaders, followers, and the work environment interacting (Alvarado, 2016; Fraher, 2016). To mitigate the toxicity that accompanies maladaptive personalities, be they in leadership or followership positions, organization leaders need to understand what constitutes such personalities to find ways of highlighting their positive attributes, such as relation-building, while providing a means for limiting their potential harm (Cheang & Applebaum, 2015; Grijalva & Harms, 2013; McKee et al., 2017).

Corporate Culture

Corporate culture relates to the overall identity, atmosphere and purpose of a company (Guiso et al., 2015). Work environments have aspects of this greater culture, as what occurs in the workplace is indicative of the overall culture of a company (Hogan & Coote, 2014). For example, corporation leaders can have a culture of diversity and innovation or authoritarianism and discrimination (Burton, 2015; Hunt et al., 2014). In the workplace, toxicity and prolonged toxicity stems from the greater corporate culture,

where toxic behavior is accepted and promoted, either overtly or covertly (Belias & Koustelios, 2014; Guiso et al., 2015; Jones & Williams, 2013).

To mitigate issues of toxicity, organization leaders must ensure their corporate culture promotes positive aspects in leadership and employee well-being, while lowering potentially toxic elements (Burton, 2015; Hunt et al., 2014). Burton (2015) noted that a culture of men in sport existed, especially regarding sports leadership, where it was unusual for women to hold active and influential roles in the sporting community. This culture may lead to increased discrimination against women and stunting women's career advancement as a way of keeping the sporting community culture men-only (Burton, 2015). Conversely, when leaders in industries demonstrate a propensity toward ethical and trustworthy behavior, employees, regardless of their values and perceptions, are likely to buy into a culture of honesty (Guiso et al., 2015).

Hogan and Coote (2014), and Appannah and Biggs (2015) established that corporate leaders could build a culture of innovation and diversity, which could benefit their companies. Hogan and Coote (2014) found that companies that relied on building strong relationships with employees promoted innovative behavior in employees by stimulating creativity and instilling values of innovation in employees. These companies were more likely to present as dynamic, competitive, and innovative.

Appannah and Biggs (2015) found similar evidence regarding companies with an age-friendly culture. Leaders, who were welcoming of older workers and were geared to accommodating such employees, tended to reap benefits from these older employees knowledge, skills, and ability to train younger workers (Appannah & Biggs, 2015). This

training can lead to changes in the company to assist older employees. In other words, culture breeds culture (Belias & Koustelios, 2014). The more an organization's culture stays positive, the more positive the company and workers become positive, while the more negative an organization's culture, the more toxic the company and workers become (Campbell & Göritz, 2014).

Nevertheless, Graham et al. (2017) found that while over 90% of executives who participated in their study considered corporate culture to be exceedingly important, a discrepancy remained between desired culture and company performance. In other words, organizational leaders seem to be still unaware of the factors that influence corporate culture, or how corporate culture influences factors such as worker wellbeing and productivity (Graham et al., 2017).

Leaders seem to underplay their roles in establishing a given culture, especially regarding out of work activities that may influence their leadership (Davidson, Dey, & Smith, 2015). For example, Davidson et al. (2015) found that leaders, who stayed prudent with their own money, tended to exhibit similar prudence with company money. They also extended such watchfulness to their workers, thereby creating a culture of accountability around company finances (Davidson et al., 2015).

Conversely, leaders who were less frugal with their own money exhibit corrupt tendencies, while leaders who had previous legal infractions were more likely to be less frugal with company money, more lackadaisical toward subordinates' money handling, and more likely to commit fraud, thereby establishing a culture of increased financial risk (Campbell & Göritz, 2014; Davidson et al., 2015). In addition, leaders prone to

corruption tended to exhibit tendencies toward rationalizing corrupt activities, manipulating corporate cultures focused on building teamwork, and achieving goals to work in the culture to conduct corrupt practices (Campbell & Göritz, 2014). Even positive corporate cultures can lead to toxicity, if measures are not firmly in place to deal with subversive elements in the organization (Fischbacher-Smith, 2015).

Leader and CEO turnover can influence and be influenced by corporate culture (Fiordelisi & Ricci, 2014). As with employee turnover, leaders of companies with a culture of control tend to report higher CEO turnover than companies with a culture of creativity (Fiordelisi & Ricci, 2014). Costanza, Blacksmith, Coats, Severt, and DeCostanza (2016) established that companies with an adaptive culture tended to fare better in the long term, partially due to the likelihood of stable leadership. In other words, controlling upper-management practices can lead to controlling manager-employee practices, which can lead to a controlling work environment and corporate culture, while the converse is also true (Fiordelisi & Ricci, 2014). To ensure better company performance, organization leaders should ensure both their upper leaders' as well as their lower employees' well-being by managing and maintaining their worker relations and human resources (Harrison & Bazzy, 2017).

As with the toxic triangle, an interplay occurs between leaders, workers, and greater corporate culture in how effective or ineffective a company is at dealing with toxicity (Pradhan & Pradhan, 2015; Tse & Chiu, 2014). For example, if leaders perpetrate or allow the perpetration of microaggression in the workplace, they set a precedent for such behavior to continue and grow (Belias & Koustelios, 2014; Hunt et al., 2014; Jones

& Williams, 2013). Similarly, if organizational culture makes it possible for leaders with maladaptive personalities to enter and stay in leadership positions without providing employees with necessary recourse and countermeasures for dealing with such leaders, toxicity in the work environment will increase (Galupo & Resnick, 2016; Holder & Nadal, 2016; Laschinger et al., 2014).

Followers who are susceptible to desire or experience maladaptive leadership also feed into a continuation of such toxicity (Baronce, 2015; McKee et al., 2017; Padilla et al., 2007). Organization leaders must actively work at designing a positive culture to mitigate corrupt, discriminatory, or other toxic behavior. I might, in part, highlight ways in which organization leaders could avoid toxic behaviors.

Leadership Impact on Workplace Mitigating Toxicity

Dul and Ceylan (2014) and Schilling and Schyns (2015) established that leadership could have either a positive or negative influence on worker well-being and workplace satisfaction. In the subsection above, Toxic Leaders, authors noted that leadership could play a direct role in how engaged, productive, and willing one was to remain at a company (Bell, 2017; Boddy, 2015). This section provides information from studies related to if and how positive leadership styles and behaviors might work to counter the toxic triangle and break the cycle of workplace toxicity (Pradhan & Pradhan, 2015; Tse & Chiu, 2014).

Much has already been said regarding at least one means of mitigating workplace toxicity, namely creating innovative, creative, and flexible work environments and overall corporate culture (Brown et al., 2014; Dul & Ceylan, 2014; Tse & Chiu, 2014;

Jain & Kaur, 2014). This approach allows workers to feel safe, heard, and become more innovative and company-loyal (Hayes et al., 2015; Harder et al., 2015; Hewlett, 2016; Jain & Kaur, 2014; Peng et al., 2014; Hewlett, 2016). Leaders play a valuable role in creating such environments, as their leadership style, personal values, and approaches to problem-solving influence their followers (Appannah & Biggs, 2015; Breevaart et al., 2014; Guiso et al., 2015; Moore et al., 2015).

Leadership style is important in establishing ways of mitigating workplace toxicity. Researchers have found that positive leadership styles, such as transformational and transactional leadership, tend to report lower levels of toxicity (Breevaart et al., 2014; Pradhan & Pradhan, 2015). Transactional leadership also tend to report higher levels of worker productivity and overall job satisfaction (Tse & Chiu, 2014). This finding can be attributed to this particular style's active inclusion of employees into the decision-making aspects of the company, the active allowing for counter views to be heard, and issues to be raised (Breevaart et al., 2014). Such processes allow for greater transparency between leaders and workers, thereby establishing greater levels of trust and offering workers clear and consistent means for recourse if the toxic behavior occurs in leader-worker or worker-worker relations (Brown et al., 2014; Tse & Chiu, 2014).

Leaders' abilities to manage ever-diversifying workplaces plays a key role (Bond & Haynes, 2014). Leaders who adopt the greater corporate culture calling for the inclusion of diverse workers or who seek to change the discriminatory corporate culture from within, through the inclusion of marginalized group, are more likely to report improved worker wellbeing and consequent productivity (Belias & Koustelios, 2014;

Mizzi, 2017). Leaders who deal quickly and effectively with cases of discrimination or other toxic worker attitudes and behaviors or risk tend to report lower levels of toxicity in the workplace (Moore et al., 2015; Webster, Brough, & Daly, 2016; Zahra, 2015). The kinds of strategies that nontoxic leaders employ to gain such results were missing from the literature. While the literature indicated leadership could and did play a key role in mitigating workplace toxicity, more research remained needed into positive leadership styles and behaviors, as well as the choices and experiences that led to such positives. The current study may add to this particular gap in the literature.

Avoiding Toxic Leadership and Promoting Nontoxic Leadership Behavior

From the literature reviewed so far, it has become clear that toxic leadership leads to toxic workers, like negative, less productive, more anxious and depressed and generally more unhealthy workers, and toxic work environments (Baronce, 2015; Padilla et al., 2007; Torres & Taknint, 2015). Toxic work environments and corporate culture can also breed toxic leaders (Belias & Koustelios, 2014; Hayes et al., 2015; Park et al., 2014). Researchers have found that workplace toxicity is bad for business (Campbell & Göritz, 2014; Eisenbeiß & Brodbeck, 2013).

That is, toxic workplaces and leaders tend to report lower productivity, lower profits, and worse public reputations (Torres & Taknint, 2015; Zhang et al., 2014). Such 'lows' can create a downward spiral, where toxicity, due to stress or other factors, can increase, causing further employer/employee negativity, lower productivity, and so forth (Brown et al., 2014; Cotton, 2016; Hadadian & Zarei, 2016). Conversely, nontoxic workplaces, often headed by nontoxic leaders tend to report higher productivity, lower

staff turnover, and generally more competitiveness in their industries (Belias & Koustelios, 2014; Bond & Haynes, 2014; Breevaart et al., 2014; Pradhan & Pradhan, 2015). It is important for organizations to find ways of avoiding toxic leadership and, instead, promote nontoxic leadership behaviors and styles, as a means of countering these negative consequences and, thereby, improving worker well-being and general business (Erickson et al., 2017; Sun et al., 2016).

To that end, leadership training and screening could assist (Collinson & Tourish, 2015; Keller Hansborough & Jones, 2014). In Edwards, Schedlitzki, Ward, and Wood's (2015) study, the authors concluded that using film analysis was an overall effective technique for teaching management students about good and bad leadership behaviors. The authors noted that providing film examples of good and bad leadership assisted students in better (a) identifying toxic versus nontoxic traits and (b) understanding why such behaviors could be considered good or bad (Edwards, Schedlitzki et al., 2015). This study provided one method to deal with organizations' concerns relating to how to find or counteract maladaptive leaders (Keller Hansborough & Jones, 2014; Sosik et al., 2014).

Collinson and Tourish (2015) found that addressing leadership issues by teaching positive practices and requiring potential future leaders to think critically about leadership strategies and the consequences at the student level could lead to greater leader success and lower workplace toxicity. These authors highlighted the need for education around current assumptions around the leadership power dynamic and the influence inherent understandings and perpetuations of hierarchies might affect workplace toxicity (Collinson & Tourish, 2015).

Researchers suggested another means to improve leadership education by having leadership programs employ creative teaching methods (Edwards, Elliott, Iszatt-White, & Schedlitzki, 2015). Leaders and future leaders tend to understand concepts around leadership better when such concepts are presented in new and interesting ways, such as through film analysis or watching a play (Edwards, Elliott et al., 2015; Edwards, Schedlitzki et al., 2015). In turn, leaders, having been trained in and exposed to creativity, may implement more creative and effective leadership styles (Edwards, Elliott et al., 2015; Rego et al., 2014).

Equally important, leaders must understand how and why toxic leadership occurs, and thereby be more vigilant for such factors or traits in themselves (Erickson et al., 2017; Schilling & Schyns, 2015). This goal cannot solely be achieved through education, as it calls for increased leader self-awareness, which maladaptive personalities lack (Race, 2017; Schilling & Schyns, 2015). Having screening measures in place, in addition to leadership professional development training, may further assist organizations in limiting toxic leadership, thereby mitigating its effects of the work environment (Keller Hansborough & Jones, 2014; Sosik et al., 2014).

As a further countermeasure to toxic work environments, leaders need to instill a sense of creativity and hope in their employees (Day et al., 2014). Such factors, along with trust, can also work to mitigate toxicity further left in the wake of prior toxic leadership, caused by toxic worker behavior, or found in the overall toxic work environment (Brown et al., 2014; Day et al., 2014). Leaders and future leaders need to be trained in how to most effectively instill such aspects, implement changes, and turn toxic

environments around (Aarons et al., 2015; Rego et al., 2014). While I did not focus specifically on leadership training, the findings and narratives presented indicated practical means for other leaders to employ. Leadership trainers might also apply the strategies and choices presented in this study to illustrate to leadership students what constitutes nontoxic leadership. I added to the literature concerning leadership from the leaders' perspective, as well as present practical ways of mitigating workplace toxicity.

Summary and Conclusions

From this literature review, all three aspects of the toxic triangle not only perpetuate workplace toxicity, but these also need to be dealt with as both individual issues and about each other (Alvarado, 2016; Erickson et al., 2017; Fraher, 2016; Pradhan & Pradhan, 2015). The conceptual framework provided a means to show this toxic triangle (Alvarado, 2016). The literature review strengthened the ideas, laid out in the AWEST, by noting how toxic leadership, toxic followers, and toxic environments often correlated with factors, such as bullying and favoritism (Alvarado, 2016; Boddy, 2014; Mehta & Maheshwari, 2014).

This literature review provided insights into factors that heightened the toxic triangle, such as maladaptive leaders and followers, microaggression, and overall corporate cultures where toxicity was allowed or encouraged (Campbell & Göritz, 2014; Guenole, 2014; McKee et al., 2017). Also noted was the toxic effect that leadership, toxic worker relations, and factors like discrimination had on workers (Basford et al., 2014; Jones & Williams, 2013; Laschinger et al., 2014; Mathieu et al., 2014). Researchers have confirmed that workers subjected to toxic work environments reported

higher levels of stress, anxiety, depression, family conflict, and low productivity (Boddy, 2014; Cotton, 2016; Fiordelisi & Ricci, 2014; Linton et al., 2015; Torres & Taknint, 2015). If workers felt victimized and/or were not given organizational support or the opportunity to speak out, they faced further toxicity, higher staff turnover, and distrust (Burns, 2017; Laschinger et al., 2014; Nadal et al., 2014). Continued subjection to toxicity could lead to a deterioration in workers' overall health and wellbeing (Baronce, 2015; Linton et al., 2015; Mathieu et al., 2014; Padilla et al., 2007).

Researchers have suggested the need to counter toxicity in the workplace; they have suggested screening leaders, training leaders in positive leadership styles, and promoting positive problem-solving and relationship building were suggested (Aarons et al., 2015; Keller Hansborough & Jones, 2014; Leonard, 2014; Schmidt, 2014; Sosik et al., 2014; Zhang et al., 2014). Researchers noted providing workers with a platform to voice their concerns and addressing negative issues with hierarchy (Collinson & Tourish, 2015; Hewlett, 2016; Woestman & Wasonga, 2015). The literature review also indicated a gap related to how positive leaders implemented and came to the styles and behaviors they chose. Instead, most researchers have noted that positive leadership styles existed and worked to mitigate workplace toxicity (Breevaart et al., 2014; Pradhan & Pradhan, 2015; Rego et al., 2014; Tse & Chiu, 2014). I provided valuable information regarding positive leader choices and the practical applications of such leadership.

The next chapter contains the methodological aspects of this study. Chapter 4 shows the actual findings. Chapter 5 includes conclusions and recommendations for future research based on the results of this study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative narrative case study was to develop a deeper understanding of how leaders selected and applied specific strategies and behaviors in nontoxic workplace environments. This study was specifically focused on a population of leaders in government and nongovernment institutions in the state of New Hampshire. This study's findings might fill in the research gaps associated with leader experiences about positive leadership styles and behaviors, their choices and the reasoning behind them regarding leadership style and behavior to counteract toxic work environments through positive leadership (Cotton, 2016; Field, 2014; Graham et al., 2017; Jain & Kaur, 2014; Mathieu et al., 2014). To best meet the purpose, fill the literature gaps, and address the noted problems, I chose a qualitative narrative study design to produce data. This chapter contains reasoning for this particular design choice, as well as why other design options were insufficient for meeting this study's purpose.

The chapter includes information on the role of the researcher, methodology, and issues of trustworthiness and ethical considerations. The chapter presents details regarding data collection and analysis procedures that I followed, the population sample and recruitment, the instrumentation used, and ways in which I conducted the field test. Chapter 3 ends with a summary of the main points presented.

Research Design and Rationale

I chose a qualitative narrative design for this study as narrative designs work well to elicit comprehensive, detailed, and first-hand accounts from participants regarding a

phenomenon (Taylor et al., 2015). For this study, such detailed responses derived from nontoxic leaders who shared their stories of dealing with workplace toxicity, undoing previous leader toxicity, and what behaviors and styles they deemed most effective in leadership for mitigating toxicity. Through this in-depth approach, the narrative design provided an opportunity for better understanding of, expanding on, and utilizing the concepts of the toxic triangle and AWEST, as presented in this study's framework (Alvarado, 2016; Fraher, 2016). I used the design to ensure higher validity for the study by including data triangulation through substantiating company documentation, follow-up interviews, and researcher notes, as suggested by Leung (2015).

Qualitative narrative studies are conducted to provide reasoning behind a phenomenon or to elaborate on the perspectives and experiences of those directly involved in or affected by the phenomenon (Locke et al., 2014). While other qualitative designs might also have been appropriate for this study, such as phenomenological or case study approaches, I chose a narrative design for several reasons. Firstly, phenomenological designs are more directed at merely identifying lived experiences from people involved in the phenomenon itself, while case studies are for identifying common experiences of a specific situation (Locke et al., 2014; Moustakas, 1994). Narrative designs, while closely and often even overlapping with phenomenological designs and case studies, provide researchers with more detailed data regarding individuals' personal experiences of and their narrative around the phenomenon (Lewis, 2015; Moustakas, 1994).

Regarding this study, those interviewed provided examples of their choices, what led to their choices, and why and how their choices might or might not have positively influenced their work environment and workers by providing a narrative with a beginning, middle, and end. For example, the participant might present a case where one thing happened, but they chose a specific option that led to a given outcome. By comparing individual leaders' narratives related to the same phenomenon, I found related themes to make better conclusions and deductions about nontoxic leadership and work environments. This approach provided a more detailed and personal account of not only the phenomenon itself but also ways for dealing with and consequences of the phenomenon (Clandinin, 2016).

On a practical level, qualitative research requires a far smaller data sample compared to quantitative research (Sandelowski, 1995). Due to the size of the chosen companies and the relatively small number of leaders who made up the general population sample available for this study, I deemed a qualitative approach more feasible. I used a narrative design to gain in-depth insight into individuals' perceptions and experiences, which made quality more important than quantity. For instance, a smaller sample could provide more valuable data to meet the purpose and answer the research questions compared to a larger and broader overview of perceptions (Boddy, 2016; Malterud, Siersma, & Guassora, 2015).

Due to the narrative design's in-depth approach, the interview process was longer compared to other qualitative approaches (Kim, 2016). This process further substantiated the need for a smaller sample, as longer interviews were time-consuming (Marshall &

Rossman, 2016). For this reason, I could not interview many participants. As the purpose of this study was aimed at gaining quality over quantity, a narrative design was far better for the study compared to a quantitative approach (see Bryman, 2016). All these factors also supported a sample of 10 participants as being sufficient for the design and study (see Guetterman, 2015).

Future researchers might wish to study the practical application of leadership choices through case studies or provide more insight into and define toxic versus nontoxic leadership and work environments through phenomenological studies. A better understanding of positive leadership approaches provided a more solid foundation for such studies. Gaining personal, narrative knowledge regarding leadership style and behavior choice may better assist future researchers in their studies of leadership styles and behaviors. An in-depth narrative approach adds to the current literature and provides needed understanding of leadership behavior and style to aid future research (see Erickson et al., 2017).

Other qualitative approaches did not meet the needs of this study. I was not concerned with establishing a new theory, as with a grounded theory approach (Birks & Mills, 2015). I was not interested in how ethnicity or other demographic factors influenced leadership styles and behavior, making an ethnographic research approach unnecessary for this study (Hallett & Barber, 2013). Future researchers might wish to conduct such research to determine whether demographic factors influenced the kinds of choices found in this study.

Quantitative and mixed-methods approaches did not suit this study. Perceptions and personal experiences could not be quantified (Brannen, 2016). While quantitative studies could provide statistical information regarding the likelihood of nontoxic leaders displaying certain similar traits, quantitative results could not provide reasoning for such traits or why leaders opted for certain styles and behaviors over others. Future researchers might be interested in conducting such studies, but a quantitative approach did not suffice for this study. Due to quantitative data not providing necessary additional information to meet the purpose and answer the research questions for this particular study, a mixed-methods approach would have been both time-consuming and redundant (see Morse, 2016). Future researchers might wish to apply such an approach to study other related areas of leadership. Researching valuable and in-depth insight into leadership styles and behavior choices best occurred through a narrative approach.

Role of the Researcher

I fulfilled the roles of both participant and observer (see Spradley, 1980). Due to the nature of the study, I spent extended time with participants, asking meaningful planned questions, as well as relevant follow-up questions specific to the participants' answers. I participated in the interview process by listening carefully and guiding the interviews to find meaningful information (see Flick, 2014). Through this process, I observed and allowed for participants' answers, while actively participating in the understanding of the provided narratives and data (see Nelson, London, & Strobel, 2015).

I recorded all data through physical note taking, as well as audio-recordings to collect and analyze supporting documentation (see Olson, 2016). This process meant that

I both observed participant responses and collected documentation, while actively partaking in analyzing the data collected (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I engaged in any follow-up interviews, when necessary, thereby repeating the observe-participate-analyze pattern. I had direct contact with leadership from both of the chosen New Hampshire firms, and I work in one of them. This situation meant that prior relationships with leaders and my own beliefs and assumptions related to participants' leadership styles and behaviors might influence the study. Participating leaders might feel obliged to moderate their answers according to what they believed I wanted to hear or adjust their answers and willingness to provide full explanations based on how they viewed me (see Chenail, 2011). Participants might be wary of providing full and honest answers due to potential backlash from myself or others from in their respective companies (see Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2004).

Any potential conflict of interest or effect on leaders' answers was lessened when participants became aware of the valuable role that their honest and comprehensive answers may play in bettering their companies. They also might assist other similar companies and leaders in lessening their toxic work environments. To mitigate the potential negative effect of having a relationship with participants, I delivered an informed consent form to reveal the purpose and processes of the study and to clarify confidentiality and the absence of any negative recourse due to participation.

To reduce any researcher bias regarding participant-researcher relationships, personal opinions on participant leadership styles and behaviors, and knowledge on the study topic, I used various countermeasures. First, I created an interview protocol to

guide the interviews (see Appendix A). A panel of experts consisting of members from my committee and an academic expert in nontoxic leadership styles reviewed this protocol. I used this reviewed protocol in a field test with two leader participants from the study site. These participants did not take part in the actual study, but they answered all questions to provide me with additional feedback about where the protocol might be further adjusted before implementation.

When follow-up interviews were necessary, I created a second relevant interview protocol that followed the same validity steps of having the protocol reviewed by the panel and field tested before conducting these follow-up interviews (see Corbin, Strauss, & Strauss, 2015). As further bias mitigation, I requested documentation from both firms, such as department profits, leadership, work environment policies and protocols, and human resource notes on worker wellbeing and productivity. I used these documents to substantiate participant claims and make less biased assumptions or deductions during analysis. I conducted thematic analysis of the interview and documentation data via NVivo software, thereby limiting personal involvement and interpretation during the analysis process (Zamawe, 2015).

Data Collection Plan

This section presents information on ways this study was conducted. I present information on and reasoning for the sampling and recruitment of participants, the instrumentation chosen, and ways in which the data was collected and analyzed. In all, this section provides more clarity about the chosen methodology and how I implemented

the chosen methodological design to meet the purpose and answer the research questions for this study.

Participant Selection Logic

Qualitative studies require small population samples to gain valuable and valid data (Ritchie, Lewis, McNaughton Nicholls, & Ormston, 2014). Narrative designs focus on gaining insight into participant perspectives and their stories related to a studied phenomenon (Bochner & Riggs, 2014). This process requires in-depth interviews, which require extended time, with follow-up interviews to ensure greater clarity about narratives and meaning (Brinkmann, 2014; Mertens, 2014). Due to the intensive interview process and time-consuming nature of the narrative design, a large sample size was impractical (see Malterud et al., 2015). The study sites for this study had a limited number of leaders within the varying departments. Based on the leadership population available, as well as the need for a smaller sample size due to the nature of the study, I deemed 10 participants, five per company, sufficient for this study's needs. If this number of participants did not appear to merit data saturation, which is the point at which new information is no longer being provided and, rather, new participants were providing information that has already been stated, then I began this process again and searched for new participants accordingly. This process continued until data saturation had been reached.

The sample size is based on purposive sampling, where the researcher chooses the most relevant participants for the study (Robinson, 2014). Participants had to meet the following criteria to be considered for the study: (a) participants must be department

leaders from in the chosen study site; (b) participants must have been active in their current leadership role for at least 3 years to have a record of accomplishment of their leadership choices and consequences; and (c) participants must have reported high levels of department profits, productivity, and worker satisfaction, as presented in the collected company documentation. The participants provided information about instances where they have used alternative strategies to circumvent toxic workplace environments. For this reason, the participants must also have had experience in or associated with toxic workplace environments, although they were not required to be part of a toxic workplace during the time of the interview. Based on the size of the companies and number of possible leader participants, there must be more than five leaders who met these criteria, thereby making five a sufficiently representative number for this study.

Participant Recruitment

Participants were recruited from in the two-chosen government and nongovernment institutions. Prior to conducting the interview, I was required to gain permission from all associated stakeholders. In communication with the government institution, I strictly followed protocol. In order to interview officials, I requested permission from mayors' and senators' offices, respectively. In communication with the mayor's office, I requested the permission to interview city managers, the fire department chief and the police chief. Initially, I was striving to interview officials from two cities, both in New Hampshire, but I ultimately interviewed two officials from a single city, one of them, as a result of confirmation and withdrawals. From the senator's office, I received a single confirmation from the senator.

Nongovernmental communication was with the educational institution. In order to proceed with research, I obtained a list of people to interview from the financial director at the school. This official facilitated the process by sending out initial emails about the study, and offered to help if I needed any additional follow-up. During this time, I also met with the pastor/principle regarding this study. To communicate with the union, I directly contacted the professional who heads the union. To communicate with a law firm, I directly emailed the owner of the respective organization who was also an attorney. The requirement for participation in this study included prior leadership experience of at least three years. The first five leaders from each company to respond to the email and confirm their willingness to participate in the study were the sample for this study, totaling 10 participants.

Any additional responses were kept on file if any of the original sample chose to discontinue, as suggested by Walker (2012). If an insufficient number of potential participants was found, I planned to recruit leaders from additional government or nongovernment institutions. I had access to leaders in these companies' emails, and the same recruitment process of directly emailing potential participants occurred. I did not expect, due to the nature of the narrative methodology, additional participants would need to be recruited, which proved to be the case. Participants were informed upon contact of their voluntary status in the study, and their consequential ability to leave the study at any point.

Instrumentation

Instrumentation for data collection consisted of audio-recordings of interviews, notes taken during interviews, and supporting company documentation. The created and field-tested interview protocol (see Appendix A) also formed part of the used instrumentation. Each of the two main instruments, the interviews and supporting documentation, are discussed in more detail in the following subsections. The field test is discussed in a separate section.

Interviews. The primary data collection instrument was that of in-depth semistructured interviews. This type of interview is designed to gather information and descriptions from participants by allowing them to elaborate on statements and address relevant follow-up questions, while maintaining a clear focus during the interview (Flick, 2014). Each interview followed a created interview protocol, consisting of a set of questions that I asked each interviewee (see Appendix A). The protocol made provision for elaborations, any additional and relevant information that participants wished to add, and provided me with a way to keep answers focused on the study topic. Each protocol provided information detailing which interview matched to which interviewee code, the actual time taken to complete the interview, and the date that the interview occurred. I used this information to determine better the average time of the interviews, as well as ensure interview data were matched correctly, to present accurate information in the final study. The section dealing with the field test presents further information regarding this protocol.

Due to the need for participants to provide their narratives, such as how and why they chose a leadership style or what influenced their chosen leadership behavior, it took a while for the interviewee to respond comprehensively to the posed question. If any of their statements called for further elaboration, clarification, or follow-up questions, the interview took a long time to complete. Because of this lengthy process, each participant had at least three hours, either in one sitting or in three 1-hour segments, to complete the interviews. They also needed to be aware that an additional 1-hour session might be needed in case of a follow-up interview.

All interviews were conducted in person and a safe, neutral, and convenient location for both parties, such as the participant's office, the respective companies' boardrooms, or a local coffee shop. Interviews were conducted after company hours or on the weekend to not interfere with either my duties or participants' work duties. If a follow-up interview was necessary, these interviews were conducted at a time convenient to both parties, with the possibility of these additional interviews occurring over Skype. All interviews were audio-recorded, and I took notes with a pen and notepad.

Field Test

A field test occurred to ensure that a comprehensive, accurate, and unbiased interview protocol was created (see Appendix A). I created an interview protocol, based on the questions believed to best align with the purpose of the study. I sent emails asking 11 qualitative research experts to review the protocol to make any additions or adjustments to remove bias and ensure all areas were sufficiently covered. I received four replies and took all respondents' suggestions into account. As such, I used their

comments to improve the research questions but ended up keeping the original interview questions.

Procedures for Data Collection

I used the interviews and substantiating documentation to answer all interview research questions for this study. Interview data collection was aided by an interview protocol (see Appendix A), and I collected documentation from the respective firms' HR and finance departments. Interview data were also collected via audio-recording and physical note-taking to ensure the data's accuracy. I used the protocol to match interview data with interviewee codes, as well as establish how long the interviews took. Participants had to meet all listed criteria: (a) participants must be department leaders from in the chosen study site; (b) participants must have been active in their current leadership role for at least three years to have a record of accomplishment of their leadership choices and consequences; and (c) participants reported high levels of department profits, productivity and worker satisfaction, as presented in the collected company documentation. Participants are also required to have had experience with toxic workplace environments, although they are not required to be involved or associated with a toxic workplace environment at the time of the study.

To ensure that only eligible participants were included in the study, I first gathered supporting documentation. This documentation was collected once five positive responses per company to a total of 10 for participation was received via email. I contacted the HR and finance departments of the chosen study sites directly by visiting the respective offices. I filled in the relevant request forms at each department from the

past five years' or more, depending on received participants' emails, years in their current position, department sales/profit data, employee and leader employment details and performance reviews, and employee or follower mentions of the respective leaders.

Once I gained 10 criteria-meeting participants from across the two companies who signed and returned their consent forms via email, I arranged an interview time with each participant. These arrangements were made in-person through a face-to-face discussion with each participant or via email to determine a place and time for the interview to occur, as well as whether one three-hour interview session or three one-hour sessions are more feasible. The interviewees had a six-week period to schedule their interviews. They were reminded about the potential for a further one-hour follow-up Skype interview after the initial interviews were completed, if I deemed this necessary. The duration of the interviews and potential follow-up interviews was noted in the informed consent form, as well. I emailed a reminder of their individual scheduled interview(s) to participants as confirmation.

I met individually with each participant at the place and time(s) agreed on. Interviews occurred face-to-face. I followed the interview protocol and asked probing follow-up questions if and when necessary (see Appendix A). All interviews were audio-recorded and I made notes with a pen and notepad. The physical notes worked as a reminder, if any of the audio-recorded information was unclear or inaudible. I used these to note anything that might not have been picked up in the audio-recordings, such as body language, which added meaning to what was said. I used the protocol to ensure

interviews did not exceed the allotted time but made provisions for additional information about certain questions in a follow-up interview.

Before the interview commenced, each participant needed to confirm verbally into the audio-recorder that they read, understood, signed and returned the provided informed consent form via email. They also needed to confirm how long they worked in their current leadership capacity in their companies. At the end of the interview, I reminded each participant that a follow-up interview might be needed; this interview took no more than one-hour; and it occurred through Skype. Arrangements for such a follow-up interview were made if and when the interview was deemed necessary, and the relevant participant was contacted via email accordingly. If participants did not hear from me regarding a follow-up interview in two weeks from their first interview date, they could assume that no additional interview was necessary.

The interviewees were asked to confirm their willingness to participate in member-checking their interview transcripts once I completed said transcriptions. I asked the participants if they wished to discuss additional issues or concerns before concluding the interview. The interview then ended, and the audio-recorder was switched off. All data collected from both the supporting documentation, interviews, and follow-up interviews were collated, and data analysis began.

Data Analysis Plan

After every interview, the completion of the full three hours, I transcribed the individual's audio-recorded interview using the online Transcribe software. I typed the physical notes for the interview and then manually combined the transcribed audio-

recordings and physical notes into one document. Each interviewee had their own documents with all information transcribed and collated.

If a follow-up interview was necessary for a particular participant, based on the information presented in the transcript, I planned a one-hour Skype interview. This interview was audio-recorded, with physical notes taken and the information transcribed using Transcribe. The data from both interviews were collated to form one whole response for the individual participant regarding their study answers. I provided participants with documents for the purpose of partaking in member-checking. Member-checking is where participants can review a researcher-prepared summary of their interview answers and make any adjustments in meaning and researcher interpretation to ensure the researcher has presented information accurately (MacLean, Meyer, & Estable, 2004). The researcher also asked the participants to partake in transcript review, which not only entailed the member-checking component, but also that the participants read their transcripts word-or-word to confirm accuracy of their statements. Once the participants confirmed the accuracy of the transcripts and made any necessary changes for clarity, they returned the transcript document via e-mail to me.

I read the previously perused supporting documentation related to the individual participant. I read and highlighted areas in the documentation related to the specific leaders' department. I compared these highlighted aspects with leader responses. If I found any discrepancies, such as the leader claiming ever-increasing profits when the data showed a plateau, I contacted the participant via Skype for clarification. Once all interview statements were clarified and compared to the documented data and any and all

changes made to ensure interview data accuracy, I inputted the interview data into NVivo. NVivo is software designed specifically to assist qualitative researchers in conducting thematic analysis (Zamawe, 2015). I used the software to compare and analyze data from all interview transcripts entered for recurring themes. These themes were coded according to how these answered the research questions, and findings across the various interviews were collated to form the final results of the study. Results are published in Chapters 4 and 5.

Issues of Trustworthiness

In research, trustworthiness refers to how valid, credible, and reliable the data collection and analysis of a study are to investigators (Elo et al., 2014). In addition, trustworthiness relates to how ethically the research is conducted (Kornbluh, 2015). The higher the levels of validity, credibility, and reliability, the more trustworthy a study is, and the more future researchers can use the findings as a basis for their related studies (Cope, 2014). To that end, I ensured the study remained both ethical and trustworthy.

To ensure this study's credibility, I conducted both member-checking and transcript review and ensured data triangulation (Harvey, 2015). Member-checking was performed by each participant to ensure the written summary about their responses was accurately aligned with the information provided, while transcript review required participants to read the transcriptions that I typed and check for accuracy. Only once participants confirmed the accuracy of the information presented and the meaning was clearly represented, I entered the data for analysis. This process ensured that only correct data were included in the study.

Data triangulation occurred using multiple data sources (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014). Primary data were collected through in-depth, semistructured interviews, while supporting data were collected through follow-up interviews where necessary and company documentation. Data were further substantiated and accuracy ensured through audio-recording and physical note taking during each interview. By comparing the interview findings with what was presented in the respective companies' documentation regarding leadership and work environment policies and protocols, I better ascertained the accuracy and truth of participant claims. This process made the data analysis even more accurate and credible, as any misrepresentations were addressed before analysis occurred (Cutcliffe & McKenna, 2001).

The data collected were more dependable and accurate, as an objective interview protocol was followed (see Appendix A). Objectivity and accuracy of the protocol was ensured using panel reviews and a field test (Leung, 2015). By lowering instances for potential researcher bias in the interview process, through ensuring an objective and comprehensive protocol, the study was more credible. Data collected were the same across each interview, and any differences, like participants providing additional information they deemed important to the study but did not form part of the original protocol, were noted. Using triangulation, member-checking and transcription review further ensured the study's dependability Morse, 2015).

The objective interview protocol, following the same interview process for each interview and countermeasures, like triangulation, transcript review and member-checking, ensured the researcher conducts a confirmable study. Data collected through

audio-recordings, notes and substantiating documents could all be verified (Padgett, 2017). The study might be less transferable compared to other qualitative and quantitative designs due to the personal nature of the participant answers.

This study's focus was on leaders' perspectives and narratives about leadership styles and behaviors. The participant responses were shaped by and fell into the context of the two-different government and nongovernment institutions in New Hampshire. While greater insight into personal leadership choices and the consequent effects on lowering toxic work environments and improving worker wellbeing was gained, other leaders in other industries or states might have different experiences. The study was only transferable because I made deductions about leadership styles, behaviors, and how choices of such might influence working environments and workers. Additional research will be needed to determine whether these deductions may be applicable to other leadership and work environment contexts.

The attempts at reducing researcher bias through panel review and field-testing the interview protocol, conducting member-checking and transcription review and using software for part of the analysis process ensured the study's trustworthiness. The practices of data triangulation, follow-up interviews, and conducting longer interviews that allowed for full expression and elaboration for participants improved this study's trustworthiness. I addressed various ethical considerations to ensure trustworthiness further. These are discussed in the next subsection.

Ethical Procedures

Due to this study consisting of human subjects, I first gained Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for conducting the study before any data collection for either the field test or actual study commences. Once IRB approval was obtained from my school (Walden IRB approval number 08-20-18-0364933), I created an informed consent form. This form provided potential participants with all necessary information pertaining to the study.

Such information included what the study was about, the purpose and problem addressed in the study, the study approach, and why the participants' responses were of value to meeting said purpose and providing potential solutions for the noted problem. The form defined what constituted a narrative study for the participants, as well as explained how and why interviews were around three hours. The form provided potential participants with the option to select either a one three-hour interview session or three one-hour sessions. If interviewees chose the latter, the interview protocol was followed across the three separate hours, with questions picking up from where the previous interview ended. Participants did not receive a copy of the protocol to avoid preparing answers beforehand, which might skew results. All interviews were audio-recorded; I took physical notes during the interviews; and each interview occurred at a time and location agreed on by both parties.

Potential participants were informed of the likelihood of a second follow-up interview in a 2-week period after their initial interviews, if I required additional information or clarification. This interview was conducted via Skype at a time and date

suitable for both parties. The informed consent highlighted the extended period needed to conduct the study, and only participants able and willing to give up approximately four hours should consider participating. The participants had the option of exiting the study at any time, and for whatever reason, with no negative repercussions to themselves or their work lives. If a participant wished to leave the study, he or she said such in an email. Each participant had access to my work email address.

The consent informed potential participants of other ethical concerns, such as anonymity, confidentiality, and instances of conflict of interest due to my role in the study site. I ensured participant anonymity by replacing their names with a pseudonym during the NVivo thematic analysis phase. All transcripts were saved under participant pseudonyms. Any references to other colleague names or the companies were removed or replaced with generic references, such as *my colleague* or *the company*, in both the transcripts and in any direct quotes used in the final published dissertation. The only demographic information gathered for the study was the years a participant worked in his or her current leadership capacity. This information was used to assist with ordering data, and no reference to his or her actual department, any other demographic data I accessed through the collected HR and financial documents, or personal working relationships with the participants were used or published.

I was not allowed access or permitted to use confidential data for analysis, substantiation, or publication by the human resources and finance departments, and only public records of the leaders' performance and their followers' commentary were available. This is in addition to the responses provided by the participants, which

disclosed more intricate and specific details about the participants' experiences. The public nature of the supporting documentation ensured higher levels of confirmability, if the study's findings were questioned. There was no ethical concern that confidential information might be leaked, as all information was company and public knowledge.

All data, both hard copies and digital formats, were stored safely and securely to ensure participant confidentiality further. Hard copies of notes and documents were stored in a locked safe in the researcher's office. Copies of audio-recordings and transcripts were saved on a password-protected flash drive, which was stored in the safe. All other digital copies were stored in a password-protected folder on my password-protected personal computer. In this way, only I could access to data collected and analyzed. Data, both hard and digital, will be stored for the five years, and then destroyed by shredding and throwing away all papers, as well as deleting and formatting all flash disks and computer-stored data (see National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979).

Due to working at one of the chosen study sites, ethical issues might result. To counter such, I made it clear, in both the initial recruitment email and informed consent form, that honest and comprehensive answers were needed for the study to be successful. The informed consent also emphasized the value of the study and the participants' contribution, thereby highlighting that the working relationship must not influence their answers. The participants took breaks and requested I stop recording, if they felt unhappy with the interview process or wished to express something off the record. I reminded participants about their rights to exit the study at any time, and that neither their

participation nor refusal to participate would, in any way, lead to negative consequences for them in their work. While others in the respective companies, like their department employees, might know of their participation, understanding how this study ensured even lower instances of toxic leadership and work environments should inspire, rather than deter, leaders from participating. No one knew who responded how, as all interviews remained confidential and anonymous. Interviews also occurred after hours, in private, and in neutral locations to limit potential researcher interference or others overhearing the interviews. Finally, participants were not reimbursed for their participation, as such practice might be misconstrued or skew answers due to the working relationships that I had with the leaders.

Summary

This chapter highlighted the chosen qualitative narrative research approach and provided reasoning for why this particular methodology was chosen. Specifically, I highlighted how providing reasoning for leadership style and behavior choices required a narrative approach, as well as how other qualitative and quantitative methodologies failed to meet this need (Bryman, 2016; Locke et al., 2014). I noted that other research approaches into the same or similar areas might be needed in the future to substantiate this study's findings and design.

I used purposive sampling with set criteria to ensure that the most relevant participants were interviewed for the study, as suggested by Robinson (2014). Allowances were made if an insufficient number of leaders from the chosen study sites met the sample criteria or drop out of the study. Provisions included extending the study

to a third similar both government and nongovernment institutions in the same New Hampshire area, to which I also had access, or recruiting additional leaders from those participants kept on record due to their positive responses and signed informed consent forms from in the chosen companies. I interviewed 10 leaders from different departments in the respective study sites. Each interview lasted three hours, with the potential for an additional one-hour Skype follow-up interview.

I presented the various methods for data collection and analysis, including how interviews were conducted, the kinds of supporting documentation used, and how the documentation substantiated interviewee claims. The physical analysis of the interview and documentation data was discussed. How I used NVivo and Transcribe, as well as how I ensured data accuracy before commencing thematic software analysis, was presented.

I highlighted how and why a field test was conducted, along with an expert panel review of the interview protocol, to limit researcher bias (see Appendix A). Other provisions, such as member-checking, data triangulation, and study credibility, reliability, and validity were discussed (Corbin et al., 2015). A discussion on the informed consent form created after IRB approval was given. Issues around ethical study practices, confidentiality, anonymity, participant rights, potential negative researcher interference, or conflicts of interest due to my role at the study site were also presented, as were the respective means for mitigation and/or assurances (Elo et al., 2014; National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979).

Chapter 4 includes the findings of the actual study conducted. Chapter 5 includes relevant conclusions and deductions pertaining to the study purpose, questions, and problem. Suggestions for future research, as well as limitations of this study are presented in these chapters.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

Introduction

Researchers have determined that leaders can influence worker wellbeing and working environments (Mathieu et al., 2014; Sun et al., 2016; Tse & Chiu, 2014). Tse and Chiu (2014), Day et al. (2014), and Padilla et al. (2007) confirmed that leadership could influence workplace toxicity, either positively or negatively. The general problem was that negative leaders are negatively affecting the wellbeing and work performance of their employees. When a work environment contains toxic elements, the wellbeing of employees could be compromised (Galupo & Resnick, 2016). The specific problem was that best practices of successful leadership approaches and behaviors promoting low-toxicity work environments were unknown. Leonard (2014) recommended that researchers must study ways in which to address toxic leadership; such research might improve working environments. The author's appeal for more research into redressing toxic leadership and thereby improving working environments denoted a gap in the current literature (Leonard, 2014).

Given these problems, the purpose of this qualitative narrative case was to develop a deeper understanding of how leaders selected and applied specific strategies and behaviors in toxic workplace environments. This study was specifically focused on a population of leaders in government and nongovernment institutions in the state of New Hampshire. Data was collected from 10 participants in New Hampshire using a purposive sampling technique and semistructured, in-depth interviews. These interviews were guided by the two primary research questions of this study:

RQ1: What leadership approaches and best practices do effective, nontoxic leaders apply to reduce toxicity?

RQ2: What leadership behaviors and best practices do effective, nontoxic leaders apply to reduce toxicity?

The remainder of this chapter includes the results from this study. First, I present descriptive findings, followed by data analysis procedures. Next, I give the results, including the major and minor themes that emerged from data analysis. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary of the results.

Descriptive Findings

Demographics

I recruited participants with leadership positions from different industries. Participants for this study were required to meet the following criteria to be considered: (a) participants must be leaders in their industry; (b) participants must have been active in their current leadership role for at least 3 years (to have a record of accomplishment of their leadership choices and consequences); and (c) participants must have reported high levels of productivity and worker satisfaction. Given this inclusion criteria, I chose 10 participants for the sample. Participants were also required to have had experience with toxic workplace circumstances but were not required to be associated with or involved in a toxic workplace situation at the time of the study. Table 1 demonstrates the backgrounds of each of these participants.

Themes. Three major themes emerged from the data: experience with toxic leadership, leadership approaches to toxicity, and leadership behaviors toward toxicity.

With the first theme of past experience with toxic leadership, there were two subthemes: impact on current style of leadership and undoing toxic leadership. The second theme of leadership approaches to toxicity had two subthemes, as well: approaching toxic individuals and reducing workplace toxicity. Finally, the third theme of leadership behaviors toward toxicity had three subthemes: mitigating toxic behaviors, adapting behaviors, and nontoxic behaviors as a leader.

Data Analysis Procedures

After every interview, I transcribed the individual's interview using the online Transcribe software. I typed the physical notes for the interview and then manually combined the transcribed audio-recordings and physical notes into one document. After member checking, I inputted the interview data into NVivo to compare and analyze data from all interview transcripts entered for recurring themes. I coded these themes according to how these answers connected to a specific research question and collated findings across the various interviews to form the final results of the study.

Results

The results of this study are presented below, demonstrated through major themes and subthemes, and supported by quotes and anecdotes from the participants. Three major themes emerged from the data: past experience with toxic leadership, leadership approaches to toxicity, and leadership behaviors toward toxicity.

Past Experiences with Toxic Leadership

The first major theme was past experiences with toxic leadership. With this theme, there were two subthemes: impact on current leadership style and undoing toxic leadership.

Impact on current leadership style. In this first subtheme, participants explained the ways their experiences with toxic leaders had influenced their leadership style currently. For most participants, they saw behavior modeled that they would not themselves model, and doing the opposite of what the toxic leader did. As L2 said,

> It influenced my work style that it gave me examples of bad management, bad performance to not do myself. I guess I would say that it comes to me back when I experienced it taught me not to do the same as a leader.

More specifically, L3 and L4 described learning about the need for respect from past toxic leaders. L3 said:

> During 2011 to 2012, the Speaker of the House of the State Legislature was a very toxic person . . . In any leadership role, it is important to treat everybody with respect. You have to try and work with anybody who disagrees and get them on the same page. When anybody makes a big deal about having power over you, you have to work with that person to become communicative and work with you.

L4 echoed those comments:

> If you work under somebody who you are able to respect and you can work with easily. I think that you kind of desire those traits in yourself. If you are put in that situation that you see that that is how it should work."

In a similar vein, L10 said that past toxic leadership had inspired the need to listen: "You must listen before you make decisions. Toxic supervisors do not want to listen to what you have to say. That influences me to want to listen and not be a toxic supervisor."

For L1, the past toxic leader showed a lack of understanding and support:

> I would say the example of the toxic boss that I had was a complete lack of understanding, particularly quite frankly, after I had children, that there was more to one's professional life [than] just the 8 hours in the office and showing no appreciation for that caused me to really dislike my job and not produce as well. And so the sum result was I ended up leaving.

Instead, L1 said that she was clear and specific in her leadership role to be unambiguous in her expectations:

> I think in terms of what I tried to do . . . if there's something that I think we used to be done and needs to be done quickly, it's important that I am very clear about that. I'm very detail-oriented way of doing their job, and they have to know absolutely with the end result is going to be, as they go down that path. That is, they not going to hear how quickly I need something done and so being really clear about times and the sort of milestones in a project, it is incumbent upon me to make that very clear.

L6 described the difference between surviving and thriving, attributing the former to past toxic leadership and the latter to the current leadership style:

> I learned that it was very bad for the organization to have such leadership, and I was determined not to be that kind of leader myself because I didn't want the

> organization to suffer. When you have toxic leaders . . . at best, the organization suffers. It doesn't work as well as it should. Would most likely survive, but thrive? . . . A good organization wants to advance and thrive, wants to expand. And with a toxic leader you can't do that. The best leaders are those that inspire people to do their best, that makes them love their job, except for just because they love the leader, not because they're forced to or threatened.

For L7, this came down to promoting and embracing positivity:

> I have experienced leadership that didn't want to deal with problems, which left the rest of us having to deal with it the best way we could. And I found the best way that I could was to keep positive attitude, to not let my discouragement show around my coworkers, to deal with them in a professional manner. Knowing there were problems and trying to have positive communications with them.

Two participants (20%) learned more from nontoxic leaders. As L2 explained, communication and vulnerability were key:

> From those individuals I learned two things. Number one is open communications, which will be no surprise to anybody. Probably those folks that I would consider strong nontoxic leaders had very strong communication skills and encouraged communication. That was one. The second thing I learned from the nontoxic leaders that come to mind is vulnerability. They were able to lead, but at the same time show that they were just as vulnerable as the rest of us, which may sound counterintuitive that you don't want to think of a leader as being vulnerable. But at the same time the strong leaders that I've worked with were able to show

> that they were a human and vulnerable like the rest of us that still were strong leaders.

Conversely, L5 had no previous experience with toxic leaders. Instead, the participant described the importance of nontoxic leaders in the past, particularly as it related to being supportive:

> The nontoxic leaders I've had have been very good about helping me come up with teaching strategies that will aid my ability to bring the material to the students in a way that they can understand it better. That's just very supportive of, you know, being there for me when I need help or if I have a problem and trying to help me solve the problem and not just saying, well, you know, figure it out on your own. So always providing any materials that I might need or directing me toward materials that could help me better my teaching skills.

Undoing of toxic leadership. The second subtheme examined the ways current leaders had to undo any vestiges of former toxic leadership. Eight of the 10 participants (80%) described the need to undo previous toxic leadership, and all the participants—in slightly different variations—explained they did so by making it clear that the old leadership was gone, and the new leadership was going to do things differently. For L5, this process included having a conversation first, and then listening and understanding:

> I explained to my teachers any conflicts [that] there were with the previous director. We discussed them and I made it clear my expectations of them and what they could expect from me so that they knew that I would be more approachable and that they could come to me and talk to me when there was a

> concern and be very competent. That I would be a good listener and that I will be working with them to help them resolve any problems and approach individual or someone who knew we were in the room environment. I would speak to them directly about what the problem was that created the toxic behavior and work to find a way to resolve it so that we could live without it being an issue.

L6 also discussed the need for open communication, along with servant leadership, to undo previous toxicity:

> The previous leader left and created hurt feelings and anger, disillusionment and the people managed to recover. I simply communicated to the people, talked to them, spent time with them trying to help them…Communication with servant leadership. Communication is the most important, but it can't just be words. One has to do with the people and help them in their tasks and show that a leader is not above willing to get his hands dirty with the work.

For L2, not only was open communication crucial but also laying the groundwork for that communication—including approachability and trust—helped to undo negativity:

> I'm thinking of one circumstance in which I came in after a somewhat toxic manager that I replaced and to undo what I did, I worked really hard to. I worked really hard to be approachable and that's part of communication. The person that I replaced was not approachable. I had a truly an open-door policy and people can walk in and talk me at any given point in time about any subject without fear of negative repercussions for them, which wasn't the case with the person that I

> replaced. So it was, it was doing that. I'm really working hard to do that and to gain their trust.

For L1, communication through outreach was essential, given her political position. Such outreach was premised on understanding and listening:

> I think I have done that with a lot of one on one outreach. You know, I'll call a counselor that I know, maybe struggling with something and say, you know, let's talk this through why you feel the way you do. I may not be able to change your mind, but if you can come to an understanding about why others view this that way, you can make more headway.

L1 included an example of such outreach to help temper any toxicity, discussing a hospital to deal with substance abuse:

> After I was elected mayor, I had been doing a lot more with the hospital to try to come up with some resources for the problems we were suffering from the substance misuse issue. And it was highly critical here in the area and within a fairly short period of time of being on the council, I got the head of the hospital, I came to an agreement and we located a place where we could locate a recovery center right in the middle of downtown. People were concerned because it was going to be right off of main street. They were concerned that we're going to be addicts and not going to be a medical clinic just to recovery center for people who were ready to get help to come and get some help…And that was about my literally calling or sitting down with every single city councilor - who some of

> them did not know me that well - and explaining what we wanted to do, bringing the hospital CEO with me and the and in the end, we supported it…

L3 said that what was "important" was "to wipe the slate clean so we can move ahead and work together." L7 added that positivity, particularly in contrast to past leadership, was effective: "I'm just by showing them that things would improve by keeping a positive attitude. I'm just implementing a happier environment, if that makes sense. I'm trying to show them that I did care about improving things."

One outlier (L4) noted there was never any need to undo any past toxicity. Instead, L4 said that respect and understanding of differences—which included listening and building relationships—was vital to maintaining and improving the positive environment of past leaders:

> I've always found that you have to be a respect for everybody. You get to know them, you get to know how they work, their temperaments and sometimes it means you have to treat different people a little differently… Being friendly, asking, being compassionate, if they're not having the best of days, asking them, is there anything you can do to help them? Just listening. Sometimes I think being a good listener is very important, especially in a leadership position… just being willing to listen and you can sometimes in part what advice some people, certain people that needed it helps just build that respect level [and is] more about how you build a relationship with the coworkers, subordinates or other.

Leadership Approaches to Toxicity

The second major theme to emerge from the data was leadership approaches to toxicity, which explored the attitudes and outlooks leaders have toward toxic individuals. There were two subthemes that came from this major theme: approaching toxic individuals and reducing workplace toxicity.

Approaching toxic individuals. The first subtheme was approaching toxic individuals, which examined the ways leaders dealt with subordinates or workers who were toxic. Table 1 presents the categories from the subtheme.

Table 1

Approaches to Toxic Individuals

Approach	Number of participants	Percentage of total participants
Conversation	4	40%
Directness	2	20%
Other approaches	4	40%

Four out of the 10 or 40% of participants said that they liked to approach toxic individuals by having a conversation with them. For L5, this conversation was about collective problem solving:

> Approach them and try to help get them to at least see both sides. Try to approach them with both sides of the problem and see that certainly you can try to solve the problem together and kind of help them to come in like that as well. Like if you present a problem say, how can we fix this? And try to get them to give you input and then work off of their input to find a happy medium.

L10 also said that consistency and understanding was key:

> I keep approaching them. I try to be an adult. I don't badger them. It's not going to get the responses and results that I want. I have to think of the workers. I have to think of what the impact of things would be for other agencies as well. I've learned to solve things that way…. I try to understand what management wants out of situations and you can't approach problems with accusations. How well can we help to really work together? We have to find more effective communication.

For L2, the conversation with a toxic individual needed to be neutral and nonaccusatory to help the individual not feel threatened or judged. L2 said it was important to both listen and follow up with the individual:

> Recently, one was an individual who others found toxic… It was basically in a non-confrontational manner in that I chose a neutral setting to sit and talk with her and confronted her directly with the feedback that I got it from others, and how she was affecting them in a negative way and gave her an opportunity to explain her position. I can remember telling her specifically that, well, I'm not making a judgment as to who is right or who was wrong, but where she needed to realize is that perceptions were probably just as important and the perception of others of her was negatively affecting her abilities. And she needed to recognize that and work on that piece. I also made a point to take notes to show her when I was talking to her that I was actually listening to her point of view… She knew that I was listening and was actually hearing what she was saying. And then I actually then a follow up our conversation with her with an email and just kind of summarize the takeaways that I took from the conversation and that I was told

> that she took from the conversation. And by doing that, I had my notes to refer to. It allowed me to kind of frame the conversation afterwards so that, you know, it was beneficial for both of us to kind of just frame the conversation and what direction it went, kind of how we ended.

L6 also said conversation was important, but also said that the way in which one approaches the conversation will depend on the context and the individual. As L6 said, "Every situation's a little different when it comes to actually getting someone." In his current position, "I can come right out and say, Jesus said, love your neighbor as yourself. In other environments you cannot be quite as direct, but there's still ways to get the point across anyway." Other ways of approaching the conversation is to "Just use a little bit of humor. You could say something like, 'That attitude not helping us at all.'" In all of these approaches, though, L6 said that "The common denominator would be communication and again, personality. Those two thing gotta to be stood up. You've got to be clear."

Two other (20%) participants specifically pointed to a direct approach. For L1, this directness was a function of the toxic individual; for example, L1 felt such an approach was the only way to get through to that individual:

> Right now, I'm on the city council. We have one counselor who was extremely vulnerable and oftentimes verbally almost to the point of being verbally abusive to city staff. And I had a private meeting made it crystal clear that I will not tolerate that any longer and that person will be gambled [*sic*] and be declared to be out of order and not be asked to leave the meeting if it happens again. And that

> may sound like a really over the top way to try to deal with a toxic personality, but there is no quieting this person. And this is all I can do is make it crystal clear that will give up their ability to sit at that table and vote if they cannot act appropriately . . . I'm doing it with a direct learning that the behavior will not be tolerated.

For L7, directness was more a part of their personality, which was why it was used as an approach:

> I am a very honest person, who has always served me well, so I'm not sure this is good advice, but in my experience, I'm very honest. I am not afraid to talk about a problem just in a very matter of fact way. Many people don't want that, so it's difficult. So maybe that's not the best approach, but for me, I don't sugar coat things I just laid on the table and talk about it for what it is. I'm not so much afraid of hurting people's feelings as other people that I've worked with are. I find that if you're very direct, that's the only way to get to the bottom of things.

The remaining participants had differing ways of approaching toxic individuals. For L3, "The best way is to rebuild trust . . . It is important to make them feel like they are valued so they stand out in a group." Conversely, L4 tried to lead by example, particularly using positivity: "I think the first step is [to] lead by example and trying to change the subject, discourage whatever negativity and trying to try to combat it with a positive come back."

Reducing workplace toxicity. The second subtheme in the second major theme of leadership approaches to toxicity described how leaders approach reducing overall

workplace toxicity. In these categories, two leaders gave multiple answers, which altered the number of answers in each category. Much like the previous subtheme, four leaders or 40% of participants cited using communication as a tool to reduce workplace toxicity. As L2 said, communication was about both listening and being vulnerable as a leader:

> Everybody knows communication is so important. Conversations that also, you know, as I mentioned earlier, I tried to display to folks as a leader that I'm, you know, I'm human too. I make mistakes on vulnerable as well. Just because I may be the city manager, doesn't mean that I have all the answers.

L2 said that direct communication was the best method to address toxicity:

> I think you've heard the term straight shooter. I've gained a reputation amongst the folks that I supervise, that I'm a straight shooter and that if they are acting in a toxic manner, even if I operated a toxic manner, that we're all going to shoot straight with each other and be honest and communicate and there will be no negative consequences for just being a straight shooter… Once again, I think it comes back to creating an environment in which toxicity will be tolerated and that if, if we do start down that path or if any department head starts down that path, that we have open communication established, so that we can redirect quickly.

L7 also engaged in blunt conversation, noting that directness was his preferred method, even if not everyone agreed with such an approach:

> My approach is very directed, but I'm just not sure that is the most effective way. That's my personal experience and as I said, a lot of people don't like that approach, but I still feel being direct is the best way and if more people were

> willing to be direct that it would come to solve problems… Because honesty is always best. I don't think that it's right to sugarcoat problems, to protect people's feelings. I feel that if somebody is doing something wrong, it needs to be dealt with directly and I'm skirting around their feelings because then the problem never gets solved… There are ways to deal with somebody doing the wrong thing by being direct and it doesn't have to hurt them. But you still have to be direct avoiding a problem.

L6 also said direct communication was best, despite being difficult:

> You want to promote the communication, but you want to promote the right kind of communication. You want direct communication with the person with whom you had the problem. That takes work that takes work in the part of a leader. You have to teach.

For L5, the lines of communication reduced workplace toxicity because it helped to "instill trust":

> They can come and talk to me when they need to and also teaching them to be able to go to each other and talk openly with each other, especially if there's a concern. Not to just avoid it or let it go, but to be able to go to each other and voice that concern and know that the other one is going to take it as constructive criticism.

Three participants or 30%, including L6, also said it was crucial to have policies and procedures to reduce workplace toxicity. According to L6, department directors had a policy that "they must contact with the teachers at least once a month and then that

contact, they must have asked him, asked them if they have any issues or problems to discuss." As L6 said, when such a communication-based policy was not used, it could foster a toxic environment:

> It's a simple policy, but it's often not done. What happens when it's not there is promptly [toxicity] will grow and grow and grow and fester and it spreads to other people. But if at least once a month, every leader, every director's going to every teacher saying, are there any issues in your classroom? Anything I can help you with?

For L4, the policies and procedures that helped reduce workplace toxicity were a combination of the organization's mission statement, as well as basic regulations and rules: "We have one here which is our mission statement. A lot of employers would start with something like that which basically should summarize about what their goal, the goal of the corporation or the organization that you work for." In addition to that mission statement, L4 said, "You have rules and policies in place that should specify certain employment things that should be upheld," as well as a reporting system for those individuals who do not uphold those policies. As L4 continued, "They should be keeping track of any incidents where the person is not following through not following protocol or not following procedures or has had any interpersonal in disruptions with others." This could be done through

> a chain of command where you have certain people that you have to go through certain channels to prevent problems. In other words, you don't go right to the top unless you have somebody right. You have to follow a certain protocol.

L4 saw this approach as useful “for any business that hires anybody” because “people are human after all and there you have to have these kind of, at least basic safeguards, in place to ensure that you have some kind of organization.”

L5 also said there should be specified chain of command to help reduce workplace toxicity: “Just reiterating chain of command. First, go to the person that you have, the bottom one, that you can resolve it that way. Then go to your supervisor and not go to a fellow coworker.” Such an approach was useful, according to L5, because “it eliminates unrest in the workplace and eliminates gossip and eliminates a breakdown.”

Two more participants, or 20%, including L6, once again, discussed the need for a community-based culture in the work environment. According to L6, the open communication could often be achieved by creating a work culture:

> A lot of this can be structured. You can structure certain kinds of meetings, certain kinds of at these organizations. Culture. I have a number of those regular meetings so that people don't get too far apart, but beyond that, you have to have a culture of mutual respect for one another and communicating the right way.

For L10, the culture of the work environment should be collegial and fun, which led to outside of work activities: “We would go to Karaoke in the summer. I like to work with people. I don’t want to scream and say that I’m your boss.”

Leadership Behaviors Toward Toxicity

The final theme to emerge from the research questions and data was leadership behaviors toward toxicity. In this major theme, participants explained the specific actions that they took to help address a toxic work environment. In this theme, there were three

subthemes: mitigating toxic individuals, adapting behaviors, and modeling nontoxic behaviors as a leader.

Mitigating toxic individuals. The first subtheme was mitigating toxic individuals, in which participants described how they helped alleviate the toxicity of individual employees. The responses given in this subtheme are presented in Table 2 (one participant did not respond).

Table 2

Actions to Mitigate Toxic Individuals

Action	Number of participants	Percentage of total participants
Resolution one-on-one or in department	3	30%
Positivity	3	30%
Accountability	2	20%
Empathy	1	10%

Three participants or 30% said that they could find resolution with toxic individuals either one-on one or in the department. L5 said the following:

> I guess I would say try to find a good resolution. First, I would try to do one on one. I think that if it's a problem that is just between myself and the person, it would be one on one, but if it's a problem with myself in that group, I think I would first do one on one just to let them know that I would like them to meet with the room and then the department will be after that so that they're prepared and that they know that I want the department to speak with them.

L7 also said it depended on the situation: “I have dealt with things both ways. One on one I think is most effective, but both parties have to be agreeable that they want to

work toward improving things." For L9, given the nature of his position as a lawyer, most resolution was done one-on-one. L9 said that when it came time to mediate a case in a toxic environment, the mediation was not easy because the lawyer and the client were not coming from the same place: "The expectations of the client are different from the realities." Given the individual nature, resolution must occur in the client/attorney relationship.

Three other participants or 30% cited positivity as essential in behaviors to mitigate toxic individuals. For L3, this positivity occurred through the building of relationships: "I always try to be positive and build networks between people who are having difficulty working together." L4 said that positivity should be rooted in respect:

> I would use to avoid those situations by being respectful, even though the person who's being toxic by showing that you have a positive outlook on something and that you know that they're bad. Sometimes you have to come back and say something positive about that person… Just steer them away from their negativity, get them on a more positive subject.

L10 also said positivity was an important behavior, but specifically said the idea of morale, and bringing the workers together, was crucial to mitigating toxic individuals:

> The biggest issue is morale. We have to paint things rosy. We have to show the picture of paradise. Before we moved to the building, we're in now, everyone was on one floor. It was a big happy family there. We did a good job this week. We were allowed to go home an hour early and we were paid for that hour. We'd have Chocolate Wednesdays and ice cream Thursdays, and it would come over

> the PA system that we could have a 15-minute break because the ice cream truck was here. They brought burgers and hot dogs for a party and we took an hour for lunch today.

Two other participants spoke to the need for accountability. L2 said the following:

> I don't let things slide, if you will. I've had situations where I've observed similar toxic behavior and once again, I will circle back and address it with people in a confrontational manner, usually one on one so that they don't feel as if they're being put on the spot, but at the same time I challenged them and hold them accountable. Don't let it slide. If I do witness something that I think could be a defined as toxic, I don't let it go. I will address it with them and they know that.

L1 also said accountability, albeit in a more public manner, given the public nature of her job, was a crucial behavior. In this instance, L1 used a public rebuke as a way to mitigate a toxic individual:

> The last situation has finally resulted in my saying there will be a public declaration made if this happens again and it's very public because it's on cable TV. And so that sounds like a threat, but it's not. I've tried very quietly, probably 20 times in the past two years to say you cannot do that in public now. But we have a non-public sessions that are protected by law and we can have conversations although you have to be very careful with is not everything… The reason I finally got to her I did was that nothing else had worked, but I do believe that a public rebuke would have an impact. And I think that hopefully that will contribute to a slight change in the behavior.

Finally, L6 said that while the specific behaviors might change depending on the particular toxic individual, all behavior to mitigate that toxicity should be grounded in empathy:

> There are so many different settings, so many different contexts for this kind of leadership, but all of them would develop empathy. The quality of perceiving how the other person feels as much as possible. We make the other person we know fairly heavy felt; to some extent we can try to read the other person and see what's causing the problem…Once you perceive that what they're feeling and then the techniques become clear, we proceed from there. It may be that they have not been receiving enough recognition or perhaps overworked, perhaps not given enough support outside of the workplace. Sometimes just saying, I can see how that would upset you. That statement alone right there, you're halfway toward solve the problem.

Adapting behaviors. The second subtheme in this third major theme was adapting behaviors, which explored how and when leaders knew to and could adapt or transform their behaviors to help mitigate toxicity. There was only one category in which more than participant agreed, and that was in knowing one's audience. Four participants or 40% said knowing their employees and colleagues helped them in using that knowledge to adapt and change their behaviors for and to the individual. L7 said, "Sometimes, there's no choice. You have to adapt. And I mean this style depends on the coworkers attitudes." L1 said adaptation was a function of understanding others:

> Simply knowing who I'm talking to, because I do know the 12 people that work with me and I can almost guess 100 percent how they're going to view in general a topic that we're going to be faced with. It's a matter of deciding whether or not in some cases some of these folks need a level of detail that will require me taking staff to help explain something. And the other folks you just need to say this is a good idea…So it really goes back to the relationship side of things.

L4 also said all the differences that individuals had were important to adapting:

> You just know that everybody's going to have different personalities and you may have to be a little bit more understanding to certain individuals and they may just be the type who can easily be negative, so you have to kind of be good out of your way to be positive in dealing with them. It may not be a case where they're going to lay down, but you just might have to put a little bit more effort into working with them, what you say, how you say it to them and just kind of be willing to listen and try to keep them focused on what they're supposed to be doing.

L4 continued by saying that often individuals have things going on in their personal lives that could affect their work performance, and knowing those things could help a leader adapt their behavior:

> If you say this isn't bad because and then all of a sudden performing really badly, then we have no idea what's going on. Let him find out that someone had a child and I'm dealing with the cancer thing. Having a compassionate heart and you know, again, trying to help this person maintain their employment.

The remaining participants all had different ways of adapting their behaviors toward toxic individuals. For L2, it was employing progressive discipline:

> Usually, it comes down to a case of progressive discipline through a performance evaluation process. And if they just don't stop to correct and move away from the toxic behavior, then you through progressive discipline, ratchet up the consequences to mentally they leave the organization or they're fired the process for it. . . . Meaning all the way from a verbal warning up to termination and this steps in between. You always want to put employees on notice if you have concerns and document documented and give them every opportunity to correct their performance and their behavior.

The remaining participants all had different ways of adapting their behavior. For L3, it was using humor: "Instead of fighting back, I have learned to relax the situation with humorous satire." Conversely, L5 tried to remain neutral and "take a kind of a behind the scenes approach and be that go between workers and their supervisor. So I'm being a neutral party." For L6, adaptation was about seeking outside advice:

> You want to get counsel if you have a board of directors or somebody above you. When I tried to get their counsel, when you do the heavy stuff, because we're human leaders, again, we may be influenced by the passions of the moment and we make mistakes. The Bible says in the multitude of counselors there is safety.

Modeling nontoxic behaviors as a leader. The final subtheme of the third major themes was the ways leaders modeled nontoxic behaviors. Eight out of the 10 or 80% of participants said that they wanted to be transparent, open, and vulnerable, allowing others

to know not only what was happening, but feeling comfortable coming to the leader and seeing that the leader was not perfect. L2 said this was open communication that included vulnerability and awareness:

> I show my vulnerability by sharing concerns I have with decisions I am struggling with, I share when I feel like I have under-performed or made a bad decision, etc. It comes back to communication. I try to model that behavior, you know, communicate openly, clearly. No surprises, don't ambush people, make sure that they are fully aware of any concerns and that have every opportunity to share concerns that they may have with me without the negative consequences.

For L3, this behavior was accessibility and accountability:

> I am a people person. I always have an open-door policy. I always try to be accessible. Strong leaders form the patterns for the organization's behavior. It is a matter of being a fair leader…Sometimes I have to tell myself that I am leader and I messed up. Sometimes I have to recognize that I have not done the best to solve the situation.

Similarly, L5 spoke about the traits of approachability and accessibility. Part of these traits were to show vulnerability about mistakes and limitations, as well:

> I first I tell my teachers that anytime you have a problem or concern, please don't hesitate to come to me. And please come right away. The sooner the better of the better, we can deal with it and make sure it doesn't become a bigger problem. I always tell them that if you have a concern or a complaint about me, I want you tell me. I know I'm not perfect and I want you to be able to come to me and know

that you can come to me and tell me about it. I realize that I'm privileged and sometimes I present myself in such a way that I know what I'm thinking, but I need them all to you as being too abrupt or too or something. And I just, you know, telling them in advance that I know that I'm not perfect and I know I make mistakes, so don't feel that you can't come to me. I try to reassure them that they can come to me with an album even if the problem is me and bring it to my attention.

L6 also said showing vulnerability by not always being right:

You don't have to be superman. You don't have to have the answers all the time, like I always had the right answers. Nobody can do that. Then you can let them know that you care and let them know that you love. I think so, especially if it's true. If it's friendly, whereas you can't just pretend that you love them, you have to really love.

In addition, L5 tried to always have an approachable open-door policy:

Mostly, I just try to make sure that my posture, my attitude and my responses are all displaying that I'm approachable so that they won't ever been like, oh, well she looks mad and I don't want to talk to her right now. She's really hearing about she was a good time and tried to talk to her and she just shut me down and she wouldn't listen. I try to make sure that none of those things happen. I want them to know that at any given time they need help they can come and I'll be up under open door policy.

In a similar way, L4 described modeling listening and approachability:

> I try to get listen to my subordinates. I feel that if I've helped somebody by being a good listener rather than wanting to listen to everything or not, that's something and I hope that I have helped some people by being that way. They can let off steam or just discuss something and try to maybe give some advice. . . . I try to hear people out. Like I said, if I feel that I can offer any kind of advice or, or at least just say, I'll pray for you. If I can't do anything else, you know, sometimes that's all somebody needs to hear is something like that. . . . I would like to think that I am a compassionate leader. Somebody who was willing to listen. Um, leads by example. I didn't really believe you lead by example lead by saying one thing, but I want you to be this very, but you yourself acts a different way. I think you have to read, you know, the way you want people to act, you should show them that's by just what you do and hopefully they'll follow suit. That's why. That's my philosophy on it.

L7 also said there was a need to be approachable saying, "I find that it's important to always be friendly, approachable, and professional. . . . What I do have to interact with them was always with a smile, professional attitude, friendly." For L1, the leadership trait was characterized as transparency:

> I think a straightforward and transparent style and respect for others and an understanding that people can see things differently is critically important to how I get to majority votes on the things that I'm asking folks that represent the city to do. I also think it's really important that our staff and our staff…I guess I would say that for the most part I'm very seldom see reasons why somebody shouldn't

> hear the entire story. It's hard to figure out a reason why you would want to withhold information and, and if you want to withhold information then I think you need to think really long and hard about what you're talking about because you know, these are, these are adults, you know, they lived their lives, they've got families, they've got grandkids. I mean the drive cars, you know, followed stop signs. These are all just people. So I would always question if I felt. And that's why I think I am incredibly transparent because I don't presume that I have anything to hide and I don't presume the person I'm talking to does it.

Summary

The findings of the study indicated all participants had past experiences with toxic leaders, which was a requirement of participation in the study, and such experiences shaped their current leadership styles, primarily in influencing the ways in which they should *not* be a leader. Most participants described the need to undo previous toxic leadership, and all the participants—in slightly different variations—explained that they did so by making it clear that the old leadership was gone, and the new leadership was going to do things differently. The results of this study also indicated the primary approach that leaders used to deal with toxic individuals and reduce workplace toxicity overall was to talk; leaders valued conversations with toxic individuals and open communication as a general approach to undercut any undercurrents of toxicity. These approaches also aligned with the specific behaviors leaders performed to address toxic behavior in the workplace. Participants noted that the preferred to resolve workplace problems with the individuals themselves, and communication was key in those

instances. In addition, the findings indicated that leaders adapted their behaviors toward toxic individuals by knowing and understanding their employees, thereby adjusting their behaviors toward the specific individual. Finally, leaders modeled particular types of nontoxic behavior for their employees, which primarily consisted of making themselves available and approachable, while also admitting vulnerability.

Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction and Summary of Study

Researchers have determined that leaders can influence worker wellbeing and working environments (Mathieu et al., 2014; Sun et al., 2016; Tse & Chiu, 2014). Bell (2017) concluded that 78% of participants had been negatively impacted in some way by working under toxic leadership. The general problem is that negative leaders are negatively affecting the wellbeing and work performance of their employees. When a work environment contains toxic elements, the wellbeing of employees can be compromised (Galupo & Resnick, 2016).

The purpose of this qualitative narrative case study was to develop a deeper understanding of how leaders selected and applied specific strategies and behaviors in nontoxic workplace environments. This study was specifically focused on a population of leaders from government and nongovernment institutions in the state of New Hampshire. I collected data from 10 participants in New Hampshire using a purposive sampling technique and semistructured, in-depth interviews. After transcript review and member checking, I inputted the interview data into NVivo to compare and analyze data from all interview transcripts entered for recurring themes. I coded these themes according to how these answers connected to a specific research question and collated findings across the various interviews to form the final results of the study. The remainder of the chapter contains a summary of the overall study, a summary of the findings and conclusions, recommendations for future research and practice, and a final section on implications derived from the study.

Summary of Findings and Conclusion

RQ1: What leadership approaches and best practices do effective, nontoxic leaders apply to reduce toxicity?

In many ways, the results of this study reinforced the current literature; specific findings also contradicted the extant literature, offering new information on toxic leadership. For example, with the first major theme, participants explained the ways their experiences with toxic leaders had influenced their leadership style currently. For most participants, this process meant the modeling of behavior that they would not themselves model and doing the opposite of what the toxic leader did. Such results coincided with Baronce (2015), who suggested that certain personalities could counter toxicity through their positive behaviors. L7 said that her reaction to past toxic leadership was "to keep a positive attitude, to not let my discouragement show around my coworkers, to deal with them in a professional manner." In this way, L7 demonstrated what Fraher (2016) and Holder and Nadal (2016) argued was a productive way to maintain their wellbeing, assist others in maintaining theirs, and positively contribute to the company when dealing with a toxic leader.

These same results challenged the literature that dealt with the influence of toxic leadership. According to Starr-Glass (2017), not only do leaders dictate the atmosphere of the work environment through their leadership style, such as authoritarian versus transformational, but they also provide an indication to their subordinates about what is acceptable and unacceptable in their departments or the larger organization. In other words, if leaders act in unethical ways, commit microaggressions, show favoritism, or

demonstrate other such behavior or attitudes, either their followers will begin exhibiting the same traits and attitudes, or they will suffer increased levels of stress due to the need to counteract the negatives (Alvarado, 2016; Eisenbeiß & Brodbeck, 2013; Mehta & Maheshwari, 2014). Such an influence was not found by the results of this study. Instead, The experience of toxic leadership influenced the leaders in this study to not act and behave as they witnessed the toxic leader doing. As L2 said,

> It influenced my work style that it gave me examples of bad management, bad performance to not do myself. I guess I would say that it comes to me back when I experienced it taught me not to do the same as a leader.

There was more congruence between the approaches leaders took to mitigate toxic individuals and overall reduce the toxic work environment. Both the results of this study and the extant literature showed the need for the positivity of a leader. As Fraher (2016) argued, toxic or nontoxic behaviors filtered down from the top, so leaders should employ positive leadership styles (Field, 2014). The participants in this study concurred, citing positivity as essential in countering and changing toxic individuals. For L3, this positivity was through the building of relationships: “I always try to be positive and build networks between people who are having difficulty working together.” L4 said that positivity should be rooted in a positive outlook on individuals.

The way leaders in this study approached toxic individuals was also consistent with the literature. Field (2014) noted that workers and/or leaders might face conflict regarding broken expectations that could lead to negativity. If leaders effectively and timeously addressed such negativity, they could avoid workplace toxicity (Day et al.,

2014). Participants overwhelmingly agreed that addressing the toxic individual—either through conversation or directly addressing the issue—was their preferred approach. By addressing these issues swiftly and openly, the participants avoided the toxic work environments derived from toxic attitudes remaining unaddressed or escalating conflicts being ignored (see Moore et al., 2015). By allowing for a conversation, as four of the 10 participants did, leaders provided their workers with opportunities to voice their grievances and concerns in order to address individual worker bad behaviors and attitudes as quickly as possible (Laschinger et al., 2014).

RQ2: What leadership behaviors and best practices do effective, nontoxic leaders apply to reduce toxicity?

In the second research question, there were two main areas of congruence between the results of this study and the extant literature. The first was with the concept of undoing toxic leadership. As Erickson et al. (2017) argued, leaders stepping into a toxic environment due to predecessor's negative approaches or other factors might need to employ nontoxic leadership strategies to improve or counteract the toxic leanings of workers and the general environment. This finding corresponded with the results of this study, which indicated that eight of the 10 participants (80%) described the need to undo previous toxic leadership. While the literature did not outline these strategies, the participants of this study did so by making it clear that the old leadership was gone and the new leadership was going to do things differently. Primarily, this was achieved through an open communication process.

The second area of similarity between the results of this study and the extant literature was the use of modeling nontoxic behavior. Eisenbeiß and Brodbeck (2013) proposed that it was a leader's role and responsibility to model desired behavior to followers, as well as to establish the kind of culture the business wishes to maintain. Padilla et al. (2007) argued that in this way, followers took their cues from leaders; if a leader portrayed toxic behavior, such as being unethical in their dealings or showing favoritism to some employees while bullying others, highly susceptible followers would begin to portray similar behaviors (Baronce, 2015; Eisenbeiß & Brodbeck, 2013). Given this cause-and-effect correlation, the participants in this study believed modeling nontoxic behavior was crucial.

The type of nontoxic behavior that was modeled by the participants in this study aligned with the literature. Hadadian and Zarei (2016), Green (2014), and Mathieu et al. (2014) found leaders with narcissistic qualities could develop toxicity in a workplace. In addition, the real or perceived leader backlash to voicing concerns or providing alternatives often expressed by workers experiencing leaders' authoritarian or fundamentalist "my way or the highway" approach to management (Cotton, 2016; Padilla et al., 2007). Such fear and lack of positive leader-member exchanges could also negatively influence overall department or company performance and continue a toxic cycle in the workplace (Bell, 2017; Peng et al., 2014). The literature advocated that leaders should attempt to provide workers with an environment where their voices would be heard and respected (Hewlett, 2016) so they would not be afraid to voice their opinions or offer solutions due to potential backlash from their toxic leader (Peng et al.,

2014). This finding supported the behaviors modeled by the participants in this study; eight out of the 10 participants (80%) said they wanted to remain transparent, open, and vulnerable; allowing others to know not only what was happening but to feel comfortable coming to the leader and see the leader was not perfect. In this way, leaders modeled an approachable, open, and transparent leader/follower model, allowing worker voices to be heard and not centering the leader over the workers.

Implications

In this section I describe what could happen in the future, both theoretically and practically. In the first subsection I examine the way in which the results of this study correspond to the theoretical framework of this study. The second subsection outlines the practical steps that may be taken given the results of this study.

Theoretical Implications

The conceptual framework that guided this study was Alvarado's (2016) triangular model of workplace toxicity. Alvarado posited this three-part model to explain the associations between toxic work environments, toxic subordinates, and toxic leadership. While this dissertation only dealt with leaders, the results of this study could reinforce the association between leadership, work environment, and subordinates.

According to Alvarado (2016), workplace toxicity was higher when workers believed they would experience negative consequences like threats if they made mistakes, failed in some other way, or did not fit into the general company dynamic, such as with female employees feeling threatened by male coworkers. If leaders accepted negative conditions such as discrimination or bullying as being "just the way things are," or if

workers did not feel that leaders took their complaints regarding toxic elements seriously, then a culture of toxicity would become the pattern in the given work environment (Alvarado, 2016). The leaders in this study seemed to have internalized this aspect of Alvarado's theory, as they focused both their approach and their behavior on approachability and accessibility, which also included showing vulnerability about mistakes and limitations. As L5 said,

> I first tell my teachers that anytime you have a problem or concern, please don't hesitate to come to me. And please come right away. The sooner the better, we can deal with it and make sure it doesn't become a bigger problem.

L4 also embodied the idea of listening and giving credence to workers' feelings and complaints:

> I try to listen to my subordinates. I feel that if I've helped somebody by being a good listener rather than wanting to listen to everything or not, that's something, and I hope that I have helped some people by being that way.

Much of the theory surrounding the toxic triangle focuses on the effects stemming from destructive leaders rather than how leaders can influence existing workplace toxicity through their positive behaviors (Cotton, 2016; Field, 2014; Graham et al., 2017). Prior researchers have focused on the subordinates rather than the leaders regarding workplace and leader toxicity, with little to no research on leaders' reasonings for their chosen leadership styles and behavior (Cotton, 2016; Jain & Kaur, 2014; Mathieu et al., 2014). I filled that gap by emphasizing the stories of leaders to focus on their personal choices regarding leadership style. By utilizing this framework as an understanding of

what toxic leadership and behaviors entail, I not only identified positive and nontoxic leadership and behavioral attributes but also contributed to the theoretical model of the toxic triangle. The toxic triangle concept was given further credence and validity through this study and was also extended by this study, with its focus on not only toxic leadership and behavior but also nontoxic leadership and behavior (Leung, 2015).

Practical Implications

The results of this study have led to a number of practical implications, which explain the way these results can be applied in professional practice. First, given the results emphasizing open, bilateral communication, organization leaders should provide followers with the skills, knowledge, and training to problem-solve inter-coworker conflicts and misunderstandings to perform their jobs optimally to lessen general workspace stress (Moore et al., 2015). By allowing workers to deal with issues internally, providing necessary skills training and organizational recourse for toxic behavior and promoting a culture void of toxicity, companies' leaders can reap the rewards of more productive, loyal, and innovative employees (Harder et al., 2015; Jain & Kaur, 2014; Zhang et al., 2014).

Part of this must include promoting a culture of empowerment, which can reinforce collaboration and employee initiative and involvement. In this way, employees' voices, concerns, and ideas were heard, which modeled the ways both leaders and employees could trust one another. When people felt involved and responsible, they were more motivated. While not covered in the extant literature, the findings of this study also indicated the need for concrete rules and regulations to guide both employee and leader

behaviors. Given this emphasis, there should be some institutionalized checks and balances in an organization. By having a set hierarchy or chain of command, there is a level of accountability that may provide needed control. As Howell and Avolio (1992) suggested, promoting ethical and moral behavior through policies and visible enforcement could discourage toxic activities.

Recommendations

In this section, I address recommendations for future study based on the results of this study. In addition, there are recommendations for future practice. Finally, the strengths and weaknesses of this study are presented.

Recommendations for Future Research

The population of this study came from three different professional fields: politics, education and law. Future research consisting of employee participants from other organizations in varied areas may be useful. Such research can allow for a cross comparison of how toxic and nontoxic leadership is, if at all, different in varying professional arenas. This study was qualitative in design, which limited the number of participants. Future studies may use different designs to help counter that design limitation, which may include a quantitative study using a larger sample or a different qualitative study with more participants. It was beyond the scope of this study to consider the employee side of the toxic triangle. Future researchers may wish to study the kinds of training, skills, and coping mechanisms that nontoxic employees can adapt to counter toxic leadership and work environments.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Study

The primary weakness in this study was that it was limited to 10 participants, which might affect the generalizability of the results. This participant number could also be understood as a strength. Given the smaller number of participants, they could provide in-depth narratives of their past experiences and their current approaches and behaviors. The smaller number allowed for a more direct comparison of individual leaders' narrative, which led to more easily finding related themes to make better conclusions and deductions about nontoxic leadership and consequent work environments.

Another design weakness was that this study was limited to including leaders' stories from three professional fields in a specific locality in New Hampshire. This limitation meant that findings could not be generalized to other companies or leaders either in New Hampshire or other states. Having individuals from three different professional fields did allow for a larger base for cross comparison and made the results more generalizable than if the participants were from only one professional field.

Recommendations for Future Practice

The results of this study indicated nontoxic, positive leadership not only could be modeled, but could also be a reaction to past experiences with toxic leadership. The model of nontoxic leadership is recommended. Tse and Chiu (2014) and Pradhan and Pradhan (2015) confirmed that nontoxic leadership could lead to improved employee satisfaction and well-being, lower levels of employee and leadership stress, and generally more successful companies.

Lowering workplace toxicity may lead to a healthier and happier workforce, which can lead to increased public wellbeing and company success (Pradhan & Pradhan, 2015). Not only can positive leadership improve worker productivity and wellbeing, but it may also improve economics, as well as the mental and emotional health of citizens (Belias & Koustelios, 2014; Sun et al., 2016). Insights from this study can help inform workplace leaders about ways in which to choose leadership styles and behaviors that decrease workplace toxicity, thereby helping them avoid leadership styles and behaviors that make workplace toxicity worse. Such insight can lead to leaders' improved wellbeing, thereby further positively influencing company dynamics and the larger society.

Findings that focus on the way nontoxic leaders model specific behaviors, as well as the way in which they adapt their own behaviors to help mitigate toxic individuals may also be used to influence company policy and leadership practices. By finding ways leaders have successfully chosen and applied nontoxic leadership styles and behaviors, leaders of the study sites in question, as well as other companies and leaders, may attempt to apply similar strategies, choices, and approached in their contexts. In identifying findings related to applying alternative, positive leadership as opposed to toxic leadership, leaders may positively influence and mitigate current or future workplace toxicity. Leaders may become aware of what approaches and behaviors do not mitigate workplace toxicity. Insights from this study may also help companies avoid lawsuits, low productivity levels, and high staff turnover that may occur because of toxic workplace elements left unattended or ineffectively managed by workplace leaders.

Summary and Conclusions

The results of this study reinforced the current literature, particularly on the need for positivity in leadership to mitigate toxic individuals; the need to undo past toxic leadership; and the qualities of transparency, openness, and vulnerability as positive leader characteristics to model. Specific findings also contradicted the extant literature, offering new information on toxic leadership. These new findings included the influence of toxic leaders modeling behaviors that were not to be performed, rather than the traditional mode of positive modeling. In addition, while the literature did not outline how to undo past toxic leadership, the participants of this study did so by making it clear that the old leadership was gone, and the new leadership would be operating differently.

Given these findings, I recommend that organizations focus on open, bilateral communication between leaders and followers, which can help with inter-coworker conflicts and misunderstandings. Such an environment should also include the promotion of a culture of empowerment, which can reinforce collaboration and employee initiative and involvement. Finally, the findings of this study also indicated the need for concrete rules and regulations to help guide employee and leader behavior, necessitating some institutionalized checks and balances in an organization. Insights from this study can inform workplace leaders about ways to choose leadership styles and behaviors that decrease workplace toxicity, thereby voiding leadership styles and behaviors that make workplace toxicity worse. Such insight can lead to leaders' improved wellbeing, thereby further positively influencing company dynamics and the larger society.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol Before Field Test

Interviewee (code):

Date:

Start time:

Stop time:

Total Time:

Preliminary Matters

[Researcher turns on recorder]

The recorder has now been switched on. Thank you for being willing to participate in my study. For the record, please verbally confirm that you have read, signed, returned, and understood the information contained in the informed consent form emailed to you previously. If not, I have one here for you to review and sign.

[Interviewee response]

Please state how long you have been employed in your current position.

[Interviewee response]

Thank you. Do you have any questions before we get started?

[Interviewee response]

We will now commence with the interview

Interview Questions

1. Have you ever had to work under a toxic leader?
    a. If yes: How did this experience influence your own (positive) leadership style? Please provide examples and elaborate fully.

[Researcher asks pertinent follow-up questions based on interviewee response]

b. If no: What did you learn from your nontoxic leader(s) that you attempt to employ in your own leadership position? Please provide examples and elaborate fully.

[Researcher asks pertinent follow-up questions based on interviewee response]

2. Have you ever had to, in your leadership capacity, undo the toxicity left by an outgoing manager?

   a. If yes: How did you attempt to undo this toxicity and improve the work environment? Please provide practical examples and steps and elaborate fully.

   [Researcher asks pertinent follow-up questions based on interviewee response]

   b. If no: How did you attempt to maintain the positive work environment, and/or improve upon it? Please provide practical examples and steps and elaborate fully.

   [Researcher asks pertinent follow-up questions based on interviewee response]

3. How do you approach toxic individuals (i.e. other leaders or subordinates) within the work environment? Please provide as much detail as possible regarding both the kinds of toxic behaviors you have encountered, and how you attempt to mitigate such toxicity when having to work with toxic individuals.

   a. What personal behavioral practices do you employ as a means of mitigating these individuals' toxicity either in one-on-one interactions, or within your department?

[Researcher asks pertinent follow-up questions based on interviewee response]

4. What leadership approaches do you employ when attempting to reduce toxicity in the workplace? Please elaborate fully.
    a. What leadership approaches have you found to be most effective in reducing toxicity?

[Researcher asks pertinent follow-up questions based on interviewee response]

    b. Why do you choose these specific approaches? Please elaborate fully on your reasoning.

[Researcher asks pertinent follow-up questions based on interviewee response]

    c. How do you choose these specific approaches? Please be as specific as possible regarding your choice process(es).

[Researcher asks pertinent follow-up questions based on interviewee response]

5. Have you ever encountered a case or cases where you have needed to adapt your style and behavior depending on a specific toxic individual or situation? Please elaborate and explain such cases fully.
    a. How do you go about determining the need for adaptation, and which style(s)/behaviors would best suit the unique toxic occurrence?

[Researcher asks pertinent follow-up questions based on interviewee response]

6. What nontoxic behaviors do you specifically aim to exhibit when interacting with your subordinates? Please be as specific as possible in relating how you exhibit such behaviors, which regularly you attempt to ensure that subordinates see these

behaviors practiced, and any hoped-for or actual positive outcomes you have experienced as a result.

a. Why do you believe such behaviors are important to emulate during leader-subordinate interactions?

[Researcher asks pertinent follow-up questions based on interviewee response]

End Matters

Thank you. Are there any additional aspects you wish to discuss before the interview ends?

[Interviewee response]

I will send you your interview transcript via email for member-checking, as previously arranged. Give the details here how they are to respond.

We have now come to the end of the interview. I will switch off the recorder.

[Researcher turns off recorder]

Appendix B: Field Test Requests to Qualitative Experts

Good Morning Professor,

I am Titin Atmadja, a doctoral student pursuing a Ph.D. in Management at Walden University. Dr. Rich Schuttler is my chair. I am conducting a field test, and I am seeking your input to determine if the research questions are aligned to the research design, and the interview questions are aligned to the design to produce the related information.

Please find attached problem statements, purpose statement, research questions, and interview questions.

I would much appreciate if you could provide feedback by the end of next week to help me generate an adequate dissertation proposal.

Thank you in advance for your time.

Respectfully,

Titin Atmadja

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PHD General Management Problem

The general problem is that negative leaders are negatively affecting the wellbeing and work performance of their employees. When a work environment contains toxic elements, the wellbeing of employees can be compromised (Galupo & Resnick, 2016). Bell (2017) concluded that 78% of participants in their study had been negatively impacted in some way by working under toxic leadership. Leadership *approaches* make

clear the overall strategies leaders choose to motivate their subordinates to achieve goals, while leadership *behaviors* are the specific actions leaders take to influence their subordinates to achieve goals (Cummings et al., 2010).

PHD Specific Management Problem

The specific problem is that within the chosen New Hampshire study sites, the best practices of successful leadership approaches and behaviors when addressing workplace toxicity is unknown, and accordingly, workplace toxicity continues to be problematic (Field, 2014). While Tse and Chiu (2014), Day et al. (2014), and Padilla et al. (2007) confirmed that leadership could impact workplace toxicity (for better or worse), none of the research outlined what the impactful leadership approaches and behaviors were.

PHD Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative narrative case study was to develop a deeper understanding of how leaders selected and applied specific strategies and behaviors within nontoxic workplace environments. This study will specifically focus on a population of government and nongovernment institutions in the state of New Hampshire.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study are:

RQ1. What leadership approaches and best practices do effective, nontoxic leaders apply to reduce toxicity?

RQ2. What leadership behaviors and best practices do effective, nontoxic leaders apply to reduce toxicity?

PHD: Identify gap I the literature

The author's appeal for more research into redressing toxic leadership and thereby improving working environments denotes a gap in the current literature (Leonard, 2014). Leonard's (2014) call for additional research into and filling the gap within this area may, in part, be met through this study's investigation into nontoxic leadership and leader strategies within low-toxicity work environments.

Framework

The conceptual framework that will guide the study is Alvarado's (2016) triangular model of workplace toxicity. This three-part model was posited as a means of explaining the associations between toxic work environments, toxic subordinates, and toxic leadership. This is what Fraher (2016) specified as the *toxic triangle*, and Alvarado (2016) developed a scale associated with this model to measure workplace toxicity. The author classified this scale as the Work Environment Scale of Toxicity (AWEST).

Interview Question

1. Have you ever had to work under a toxic leader?
    a. If yes: How did this experience influence your own (positive) leadership style? Please provide examples and elaborate fully.
    b. If no: What did you learn from your nontoxic leader(s) that you attempt to employ in your own leadership position? Please provide examples and elaborate fully.
2. Have you ever had to, in your leadership capacity, undo the toxicity left by an outgoing manager?

   a. If yes: How did you attempt to undo this toxicity and improve the work environment? Please provide practical examples and steps and elaborate fully.
   b. If no: How did you attempt to maintain the positive work environment, and/or improve upon it? Please provide practical examples and steps and elaborate fully.

3. How do you approach toxic individuals (i.e. other leaders or subordinates) within the work environment? Please provide as much detail as possible regarding both the kinds of toxic behaviors you have encountered, and how you attempt to mitigate such toxicity when having to work with toxic individuals.
   a. What personal behavioral practices do you employ as a means of mitigating these individuals' toxicity either in one-on-one interactions, or within your department?
4. What leadership approaches do you employ when attempting to reduce toxicity in the workplace? Please elaborate fully.
   a. What leadership approaches have you found to be most effective in reducing toxicity?
   b. Why do you choose these specific approaches? Please elaborate fully on your reasoning.
   c. How do you choose these specific approaches? Please be as specific as possible regarding your choice process(es).

5. Have you ever encountered a case or cases where you have needed to adapt your style and behavior depending on a specific toxic individual or situation? Please elaborate and explain such cases fully.
    a. How do you go about determining the need for adaptation, and which style(s)/behaviors would best suit the unique toxic occurrence?
6. What nontoxic behaviors do you specifically aim to exhibit when interacting with your subordinates? Please be as specific as possible in relating how you exhibit such behaviors, which regularly you attempt to ensure that subordinates see these behaviors practiced, and any hoped-for or actual positive outcomes you have experienced as a result.

Why do you believe such behaviors are important to emulate during leader-subordinate interactions?

Appendix C: Details of Field Test Experts Consulted

Table C1

Details of Field Test Experts Consulted

FACULTY EXPERT	Program	Research Method Experience
Expert 1	MGMT	Qualitative
Expert 2	MGMT	Qualitative
Expert 3	MGMT	Qualitative
Expert 4	MGMT	Qualitative
Expert 5	MGMT	Qualitative
Expert 6	MGMT	Qualitative
Expert 7	MGMT	Qualitative
Expert 8	MGMT	Qualitative

Appendix D: Responses from Field Test Experts

Table D1

Responses from Field Test Experts

Name of expert	Responded (Y / N)?	Response
Expert 1	N	No response
Expert 2	Y	1. The key to alignment is to say the same thing in each statement. Reread your purpose, problem and research statement and make sure you are saying the exact same thing.
Expert 3	N	Good evening. I am not a professor. I am a doctoral student still working on my prospectus.
Expert 4	N	I just checked that I am faculty of DIT program. You should search for any faculty of Management to give you directions. I am not authorize to direct you. Best of luck.
Expert 5	Y	2. Thank you for your email and I am honored to be invited to review your draft plan, and to offer input. I know your Chair is giving you great guidance, so please consider this just my opinion for your consideration in your planning. Please see below where I have highlighted my responses to your questions. I think this looks like a very interesting study; and I just bring to your attention the need to define clearly the level of management you are including in the study and how you account for multiple levels of management. Organizational system theory would suggest that when there is a conflict in the environment, or a poisoned (toxic) work environment, there are enabling leaders at the level above where the toxicity is being played out, who may be unaware of their influence. After reading the draft, I believe you are on the right track and have asked for you to clarify some sentences based on the phrasing, but I see the alignment in the problem, purpose, questions, and interview questions. Please connect with me if I can be of any further help. I look forward to seeing your draft completed.

(continued)

Name of expert	Responded (Y / N)?	Response
Expert 6	Y	3. PHD Specific Management Problem The specific problem was that best practices of successful leadership approaches, and behaviors were unknown when addressing low-toxicity work environments. . While Tse and Chiu (2014), Day et al. (2014), and Padilla et al. (2007) confirmed that leadership could impact workplace toxicity (for better or worse), none of the research outlined what the impactful leadership approaches and behaviors were. *[The specific problem is a bit awkward. What if you start with: The specific problem is that best practices of successful leadership approaches and behaviors is unknown when addressing low-toxicity work environments?]* PHD Purpose Statement The purpose of this qualitative narrative case study was to develop a deeper understanding of how leaders selected and applied specific strategies and behaviors within nontoxic workplace environments. This study will specifically focus on a population of government and nongovernment institutions in the state of New Hampshire. . *[The purpose has to use the same words as the problem. If you used the words "successful" in the problem, you have to use the same words in the Purpose, too. In the problem, you did not use the words "low-toxicity." You might want to include "low-toxicity" in the problem?* Research Questions The research questions guiding this study are: **RQ1.** What leadership approaches and best practices do effective, nontoxic leaders apply to reduce toxicity? **RQ2.** What leadership behaviors and best practices do effective, nontoxic leaders apply to reduce toxicity? do effective nontoxic leaders apply in order to reduce toxicity within government and nongovernment institutions in New Hampshire?

Name of expert	Responded (Y / N)?	Response
		Interview questions*: [You are looking for best practices, so you need to focus on the positive aspects of a successful leader. You have to define a toxic leader so everyone has the same definition.* (continued) 1. Have you ever had to work under a toxic leader? a. If yes: How did this experience influence your own (positive) leadership style? Please provide examples and elaborate fully. b. If no: What did you learn from your nontoxic leader(s) that you attempt to employ in your own leadership position? Please provide examples and elaborate fully. 1 Have you ever had to, in your leadership capacity, undo the toxicity left by an outgoing manager? a . If yes: How did you attempt to undo this toxicity and improve the work environment? Please provide practical examples and steps and elaborate fully. b. If no: How did you attempt to maintain the positive work environment, and/or improve upon it? Please provide practical examples and steps and elaborate fully. *2 [The second questions have to deal with leadership behaviors. You also have too many questions here. Limit these to* 5. How do you approach toxic individuals (i.e. other leaders or subordinates) within the work environment? Please provide as much detail as possible regarding both the kinds of toxic behaviors you have encountered, and how you attempt to mitigate such toxicity when having to work with toxic individuals. a. What personal behavioral practices *[The best practices should fall under RQ 1.]* do you employ as a means of mitigating these individuals' toxicity either in one-on-one interactions, or within your department? 3 What leadership approaches *[The approaches should be in RQ 1]*. do you employ when attempting to reduce toxicity in the workplace? Please elaborate fully. a. What leadership approaches have you found to be most effective in reducing toxicity? b .Why do you choose these specific approaches? Please elaborate fully on your reasoning. c. How do you choose these specific approaches? Please be as specific as possible regarding your choice process(es).

Name of expert	Responded (Y / N)?	Response
Expert 7	N	No response
Expert 8	Y	How did this experience influence your own (positive) leadership style? Titjan, this is a leading question by including the word positive. Remove it and it'll be fine. (continued) I think you'll have to be very careful about defining toxicity in the workplace environment. What is toxic to one person may be fine to another. I think that, in your questions, you're assuming the interviewee is in a leadership position. That may not be true so you'll need to find that out from each person. Question 5 has a lot of parts to it. In an interview, try to ask only one thing at a time. For example, ask if there was a case when instead of "cases" and "examples".

Appendix E: Interview Protocol After Field Test

Interviewee (code):

Date:

Start time:

Stop time:

Total Time:

Preliminary Matters

[Researcher turns on recorder]

The recorder has now been switched on. Thank you for being willing to participate in my study. For the record, please verbally confirm that you have read, signed, returned, and understood the information contained in the informed consent form emailed to you previously. If not, I have one here for you to review and sign.

[Interviewee response]

Please state how long you have been employed in your current position.

[Interviewee response]

Thank you. Do you have any questions before we get started?

[Interviewee response]

We will now commence with the interview

Interview Questions

1. Have you ever had to work under a toxic leader?
    a. If yes: How did this experience influence your own (positive) leadership style? Please provide examples and elaborate fully.

[Researcher asks pertinent follow-up questions based on interviewee response]

b. If no: What did you learn from your nontoxic leader(s) that you attempt to employ in your own leadership position? Please provide examples and elaborate fully.

[Researcher asks pertinent follow-up questions based on interviewee response]

2. Have you ever had to, in your leadership capacity, undo the toxicity left by an outgoing manager?

   a. If yes: How did you attempt to undo this toxicity and improve the work environment? Please provide practical examples and steps and elaborate fully.

   [Researcher asks pertinent follow-up questions based on interviewee response]

   b. If no: How did you attempt to maintain the positive work environment, and/or improve upon it? Please provide practical examples and steps and elaborate fully.

   [Researcher asks pertinent follow-up questions based on interviewee response]

3. How do you approach toxic individuals (i.e. other leaders or subordinates) within the work environment? Please provide as much detail as possible regarding both the kinds of toxic behaviors you have encountered, and how you attempt to mitigate such toxicity when having to work with toxic individuals.

   a. What personal behavioral practices do you employ as a means of mitigating these individuals' toxicity either in one-on-one interactions, or within your department?

[Researcher asks pertinent follow-up questions based on interviewee response]

4. What leadership approaches do you employ when attempting to reduce toxicity in the workplace? Please elaborate fully.
    a. What leadership approaches have you found to be most effective in reducing toxicity?

[Researcher asks pertinent follow-up questions based on interviewee response]

    b. Why do you choose these specific approaches? Please elaborate fully on your reasoning.

[Researcher asks pertinent follow-up questions based on interviewee response]

    c. How do you choose these specific approaches? Please be as specific as possible regarding your choice process(es).

[Researcher asks pertinent follow-up questions based on interviewee response]

5. Have you ever encountered a case or cases where you have needed to adapt your style and behavior depending on a specific toxic individual or situation? Please elaborate and explain such cases fully.
    a. How do you go about determining the need for adaptation, and which style(s)/behaviors would best suit the unique toxic occurrence?

[Researcher asks pertinent follow-up questions based on interviewee response]

6. What nontoxic behaviors do you specifically aim to exhibit when interacting with your subordinates? Please be as specific as possible in relating how you exhibit such behaviors, who regularly you attempt to ensure that subordinates see these

behaviors practiced, and any hoped-for or actual positive outcomes you have experienced as a result.

a. Why do you believe such behaviors are important to emulate during leader-subordinate interactions?

[Researcher asks pertinent follow-up questions based on interviewee response]

End Matters

Thank you. Are there any additional aspects you wish to discuss before the interview ends?

[Interviewee response]

I will send you your interview transcript via email for member-checking, as previously arranged. Give the details here how they are to respond.

We have now come to the end of the interview. I will switch off the recorder.

[Researcher turns off recorder]