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**MINDFULNESS AND THE TOXIC TRIANGLE:
REDUCING THE NEGATIVE IMPACT
OF TOXIC LEADERSHIP IN
ORGANIZATIONS**

**A Research Project
Presented to the Faculty of
The Graziadio Business School
Pepperdine University**

**In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science
In
Organization Development**

**by
Gary Cheng
July 2018**

This research project, completed by

GARY CHENG

under the guidance of the Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the faculty of The Graziadio Business School in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE
IN ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT

Date: July 2018

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Abstract

Toxic leadership costs organizations millions at a time in lost employees, lost customers, lost productivity, and even lost health. The literature shows toxic leadership extends beyond just leaders into an interconnected “toxic triangle” of destructive leaders, conducive environments, and susceptible followers. This study explored, “Can a free, online mindfulness-based stress reduction course reduce the negative impact of toxic leadership on the organization?” Ten volunteers self-identified as currently working under a toxic leader. The study used an explanatory sequential mixed methods design to measure resistance, compliance, and core self-evaluation along with interviews and journals. The results indicated mindfulness did reduce the negative impact: conducive environments were less conducive and susceptible followers were less susceptible. Additionally, mindfulness had influence on the entire toxic triangle and resulted in unique Toxic Triangle Influence Maps for each situation. Finally, family systems theory was found to be particularly useful for understanding leadership in a toxic triangle.

Keywords: toxic leaders, toxic triangle, destructive leadership, conducive environments, susceptible followers, mindfulness

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Much has been written about toxic leaders and their toll on organizations. Some have focused on toxic leaders and why we choose them (Williams, 2016). Others have focused on developing a valid scale for measuring toxic leadership (Schmidt, 2008). The U.S. Army commissioned a two-year study to identify the consequences and correlations of toxic leadership (Steele, 2011). Current estimates state that 20%–30% of all leaders are toxic (Veldsman, 2016). It is a pervasive problem experienced in all of society from healthcare to corporations, in schools and in the military, and in religious congregations, nonprofits, and political organizations.

Wherever it occurs, toxic leadership comes at a great cost. In Veldsman's (2016) research, he lists the following organizational costs resulting from toxic leadership:

- Negative emotional moods and mood swings: anger, despair, despondency, frustration, pessimism, and aggression.
- Unproductive and meaningless work.
- Destructive and counterproductive conduct.
- Employee physical and emotional disengagement and withdrawal such as absenteeism, lack of contribution, and turnover.
- Unethical, deviant conduct: theft, fraud, and sabotage.
- Poor well-being and health.
- Low (team) morale and work satisfaction.
- Organizational dis-identification and low organizational commitment.
- General life dissatisfaction.

In other organizations such as hospitals and the military, toxic leadership can cost lives. Even in private corporations, one can recall the recent tragedy of Maturi Takahashi, age 24, who committed suicide as a result from a toxic work culture and reported “power harassment by supervisors” (Soble, 2016).

There have been multiple approaches to dealing with this problem. One example is the suggestion that “toxic handlers” play a legitimate and vital role in organizations (Frost, 1999). Another proposed approach is to view toxic leaders less as a detriment and more as an organizational asset worth developing (Goldman, 2009). For example, Kets de Vries (2014) focuses on coaching as an effective way to manage toxic leaders. In general, the common approach over the last 50 years has been to focus on the toxic leaders themselves. However, this study was focused on the people the leaders lead—the followers. This study examined a relatively recent model for understanding toxic work environments called the “toxic triangle” composed of destructive leaders, susceptible followers, and a conducive environment (Padilla, Hogan, & Kaiser, 2007). The study used the toxic triangle as a framework to explore the organizational impact of mindfulness when introduced into a toxic work environment through its followers.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects on the toxic triangle system when mindfulness is introduced to followers currently working under a leader perceived to be toxic. The study used an explanatory sequential mixed methods design which involved collecting quantitative data first and then explaining the quantitative results using qualitative data as a follow-up. The intent of the study was to answer the question,

“Can a free, online Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) course reduce the negative impact of toxic leadership on the organization?”

Beyond answering the question of whether or not the MBSR course reduces the negative impact of toxic leadership on the organization, secondary gains were expected in the form of observing *what kinds* of impact the MBSR intervention had on the three parts of the toxic triangle: destructive leaders, other susceptible followers, and the conducive environment. This study can benefit any organization by demonstrating the extent to which a simple, free mindfulness intervention can reduce the costly and negative outcomes associated with destructive leaders in an organization. Like a vaccine, the follower-centric intervention from this study can potentially serve to “immunize” an organization from both toxic leaders and conducive environments. Chapter 2 will review the relevant academic literature on destructive leadership and the toxic triangle, family systems theory, and mindfulness.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter supports the research question, “Can a free, online Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) course reduce the negative impact of toxic leadership on the organization?” This chapter summarizes existing literature on destructive leadership, particularly the “toxic triangle” of destructive leaders, susceptible followers, and conducive environments (Padilla et al., 2007) and a taxonomy of susceptible followers built on the works of Barbuto (2000) and Thoroughgood, Padilla, Hunter, and Tate (2012). This chapter also reviews literature on family systems theory and mindfulness. Gaps of knowledge in the literature are pointed out as well as links between the toxic triangle theory, susceptible followers taxonomy, family systems theory, and mindfulness to provide rationale for the decision to measure the three dependent variables, the follower’s resistance, compliance, and core self-evaluation, coupled with the qualitative data of interviews and journal entries. The chapter is organized into three parts: a definition of destructive leadership and the toxic triangle, family systems theory, and mindfulness.

A Definition of Destructive Leadership

Much has been written on the subject of toxic or destructive leaders, but most research has focused on the leaders and not the followers nor the environments that enable and sustain toxic leaders. “The psychological study of leadership has overwhelmingly focused on how leaders influence individual followers” (Kaiser, Hogan, & Craig, 2008, p. 99). Therefore, I embrace a more holistic definition of destructive leadership introduced by Padilla et al. (2007) which treats destructive leadership as a complex system called the “toxic triangle” with three interrelated variables: destructive

leaders, susceptible followers, and conducive environments (Figure 1). The research on each vertex of the toxic triangle is summarized in the following sections.

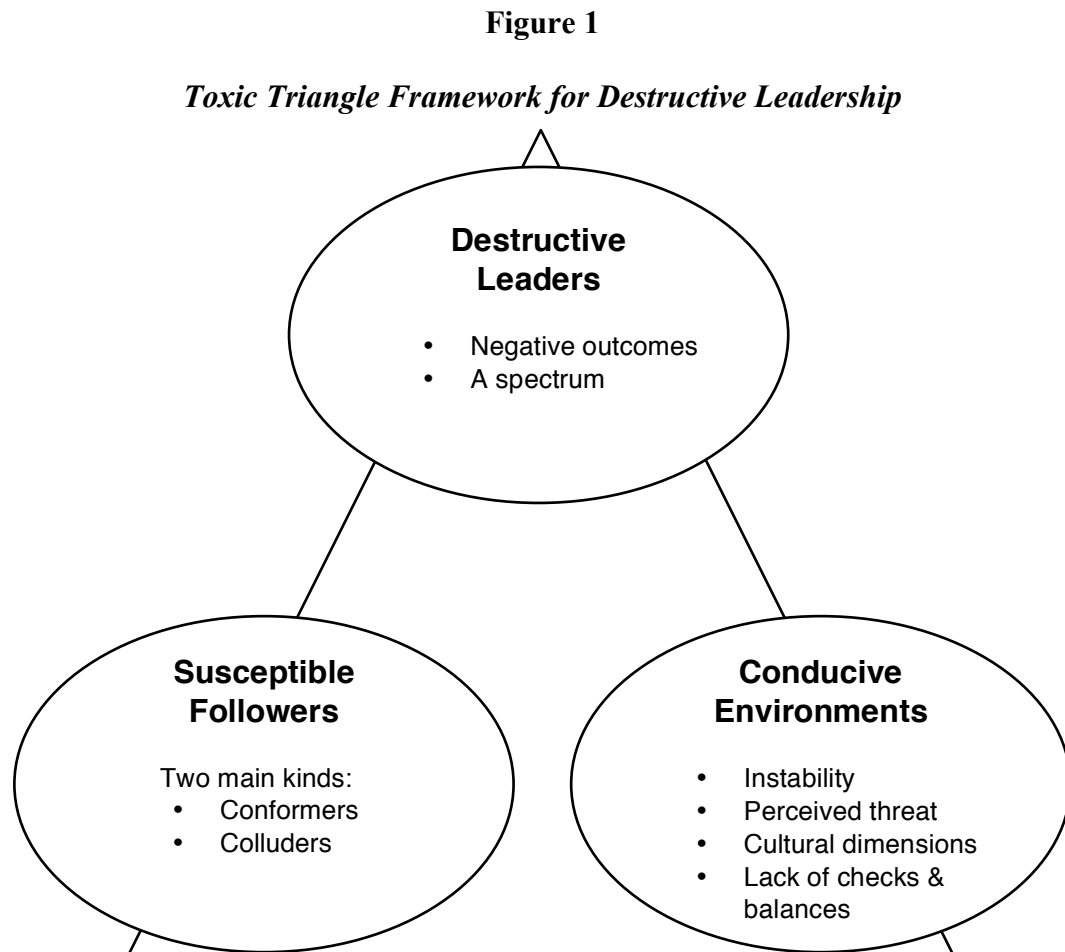


Figure 1. Destructive leadership can be understood as a system (adapted from Padilla et al., 2007).

Toxic Triangle, First Vertex – Toxic Leaders. The history of leader-centric research has typically focused on traits (Bass, 1990; Judge, Bono, Ilies, & Gerhardt, 2002; Lipman-Blumen, 2005; Lord, DeVader, & Alliger, 1986; Stogdill, 1948) and behaviors (Fleishman, 1953; Katz, Maccoby, & Morse, 1987; Lipman-Blumen, 2005). More recent research has focused on topics such as defining *destructive leadership*, with Einarsen, Aasland, and Skogstad (2007) offering the widely cited definition, “systematic

and repeated behavior by a leader, supervisor, or manager that violates the legitimate interest of the organization by undermining and/or sabotaging the organization's goals, tasks, resources, and effectiveness and/or the motivation, well-being or job satisfaction of subordinates” (p. 20). The definition from Einarsen et al. (2007) is broad enough to include both process and outcomes, whereas others try to narrow the definition to one or the other. For example, some researchers create taxonomies of traits and behaviors that are destructive (Keashly, 2001; Schmidt, 2008; Shaw, Erickson, & Harvey, 2011).

On the other hand, Padilla et al. (2007) argue that the term *destructive leadership* should be outcomes focused only, not process focused at all. In their view, destructive leadership should be defined in terms of harmful organizational outcomes, regardless of process. They write, “If leaders, in combination with followers and contexts, harm constituents (both internal and external stakeholders) or damage organizations, then destructive leadership has occurred” (Padilla et al., 2007, p. 178). The authors are careful to note that their definition does not diminish the negative impact of destructive leaders’ behaviors on their followers. However, they suggest their definition is more useful than a process-based definition because addressing negative organizational outcomes naturally promotes productive discussion around solutions to end this sort of destructive leadership in a way that, for various reasons, is not present when toxic behaviors such as yelling, coercion, emotional abuse, etc. are allowed to continue.

Finally, note that destructive leadership is a spectrum... even the best CEOs make mistakes and even the most abusive leaders can produce positive results for the organization. Since this study used a small sample size and was exploratory in nature, I

opted to use the broader definition proposed by Einarsen et al. (2007) which encompasses both processes and outcomes.

Toxic Triangle, Second Vertex – Susceptible Followers. Not much research has been conducted on the topic of susceptible followers. Lipman-Blumen (2011) argued that followers have “an array of existential, psychological, sociological and psycho-social factors acting as inhibitors of followers’ resistance, allowing toxic leaders to go about their merry way quite unimpeded” (p. 334). Along these same lines, one of the most impactful works on susceptible followers is Barbuto’s (2000) work on influence triggers. Barbuto introduces a comprehensive framework for understanding follower compliance and the relative probability that any particular trigger will result in follower compliance or non-compliance. A trigger is defined as a follower’s “instantaneous reaction to a [leader’s] influence attempt and describes the essence or reason for compliance,” (Barbuto, 2000, p. 366) where the triggers are understood from the follower’s point of view and result from the leader’s inducement, whether intentional or unintentional. Barbuto’s framework accounts for the interaction of three variables to determine the likelihood that a particular influence trigger will result in follower compliance vs. non-compliance. These three variables are the target’s level of resistance, the target’s motivation source, and the leader’s base of power (Figure 2). Barbuto then determined 10 unique combinations where follower compliance would be most favorable when all of these variables are aligned in compatibility (see Table 1).

Figure 2

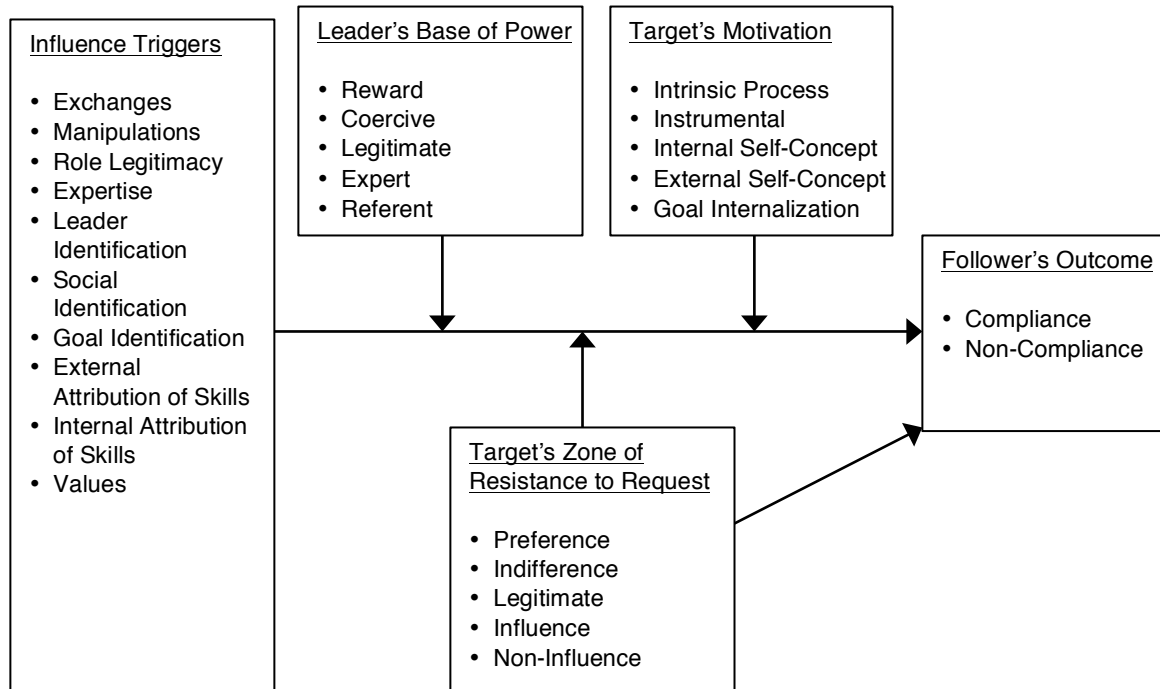
Framework for Understanding Follower Compliance (adapted from Barbuto, 2000)

Table 1

Favorable Conditions to Follower Compliance (Barbuto, 2000)

Follower-based Influence Triggers	Target's Motivation Is High in	Target Perceives Leader's Social Power to Be High in	Target's Resistance Level to Tasks or Goals Requested
Exchanges	Instrumental	Reward	Preference, Indifference, Legitimate
Manipulations	Instrumental	Coercive	Preference, Indifference, Legitimate
Role legitimacy	None proposed	Legitimate	Preference, Indifference, Legitimate
Expertise	Goal internalization	Expert	Preference, Indifference, Legitimate
Leader identification	Self-concept external	Referent	Preference, Indifference, Legitimate
External attributions	Self-concept external	Referent	Preference, Indifference, Legitimate
Social identification	Self-concept external	Referent	Preference, Indifference, Legitimate
Value-based	Goal internalization	Expert	Preference, Indifference, Legitimate
Internal attributions	Self-concept internal	None proposed	Preference, Indifference, Legitimate
Goal identification	Goal internalization	Expert	Preference, Indifference, Legitimate

For example, to illustrate Barbuto's (2000) first combination, if a follower is (1) highly motivated by *instrumental* rewards such as pay or promotions, (2) perceives the leader as being in control of *rewards* in the organization, and (3) has a low resistance to the suggested behavior (*prefers* the suggested behavior, is *indifferent* to the suggested behavior, or considers the behavior reasonable or *legitimate*), then the follower is highly susceptible to compliance if the leader induces an *exchange*-based influence trigger (meaning the leader has attached contingent rewards to a goal or task completion).

Thoroughgood et al. (2012) simultaneously built on Barbuto's (2000) work and prior research on conformers (prone to obedience and thus do not engage in destructive behavior alone) and colluders (actively contribute to the destructive leader's mission). By combining these two bodies of research and theory, Thoroughgood et al. (2012) proposed a taxonomy for susceptible followers with five key classifications: three conformer sub-types (*lost souls*, *authoritarians*, and *bystanders*) and two colluder sub-types (*acolytes* and *opportunists*). Their model creates a unique profile for each type by integrating Barbuto's work on follower compliance (Figure 3).

Figure 3

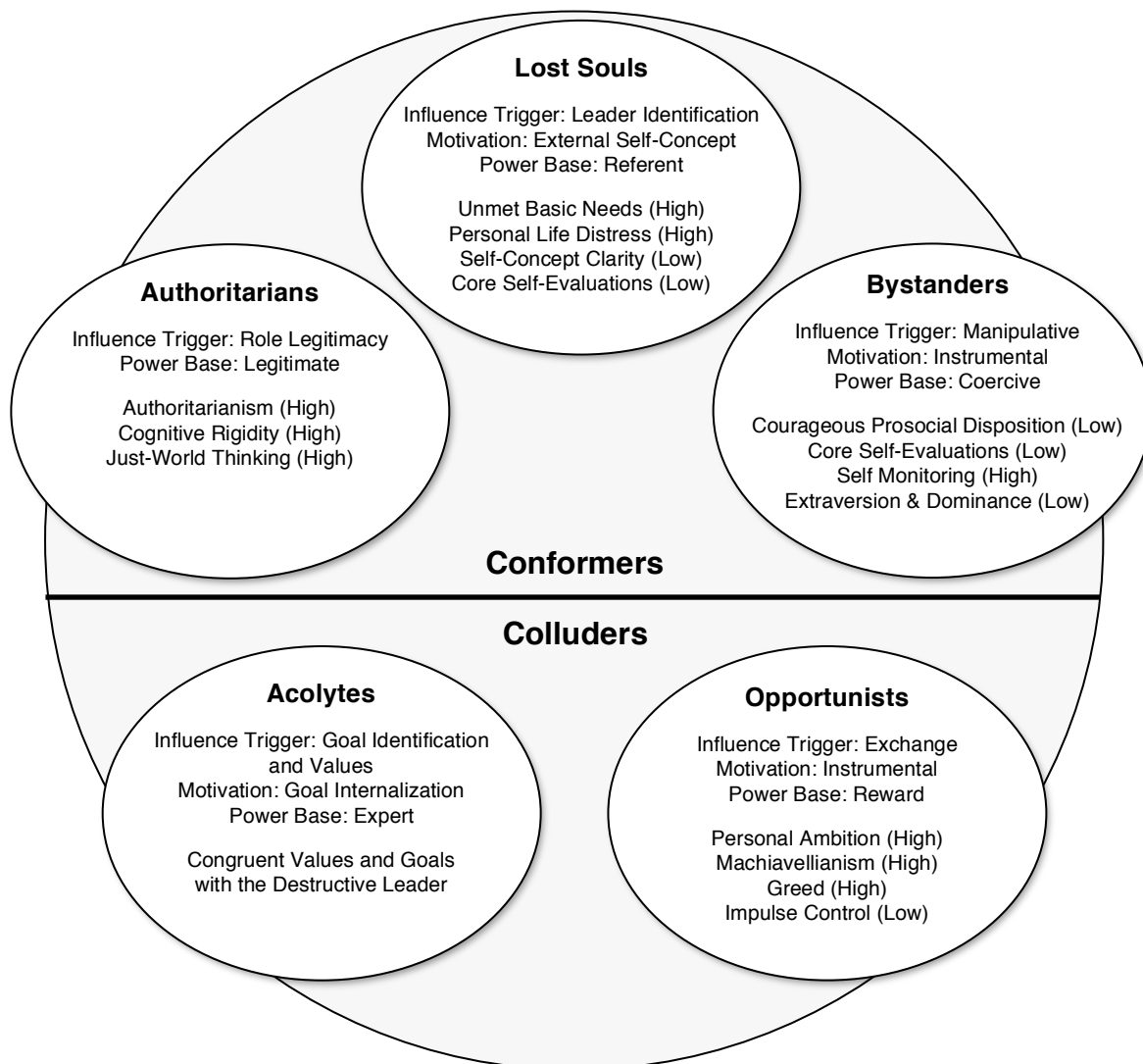
Taxonomy of Susceptible Followers: Five Key Types

Figure 3. Taxonomy of susceptible followers (adapted from Thoroughgood et al., 2012).

Toxic Triangle, Third Vertex – Conducive Environments. Conducive environments have five key characteristics: uncertainty, instability, specific cultural dimensions, a lack of checks and balances, and a perceived lack of organizational resources (Keashly, 2001; Padilla et al., 2007). Research surrounding conducive environments for destructive leadership has shown that uncertainty consistently enhances the preference for narcissistic leaders, especially in the case of perceived threats as in

rival business competitors or national security (Nevicka, De Hoogh, Van Vianen, & Ten Velden, 2013). Similarly, instability in an environment allows leaders to be granted more authority in order to take quick action and make unilateral decisions (Padilla et al., 2007). The cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 1991) most associated with conducive environments are the avoidance of uncertainty, collectivism (as opposed to individualism), and high power distance (Padilla et al., 2007, p. 186). High power distance, in particular, is when followers accept and expect that power is distributed unequally (Hofstede, 1991). The lack of checks and balances can be created when there is a culture of dependence and apathy among followers (Padilla et al., 2007, p. 186).

Finally, Keashly's (2001) research on the subjective experience of emotional abuse from the target's point of view produced the insight that "people's appraisals of a situation as stressful is whether they perceive they have the resources to cope and respond to what is happening" (p. 237) where the perceived resources may be either personal resources (e.g., high self-esteem, self-determination, and conflict management skill) or organizational resources (e.g., coworker and supervisory support, workplace policies, and effective implementation of policy). Keashly's findings showed that an ineffective organizational response to a follower's complaint could make the follower feel as if the organization is supporting the toxic leader.

Family Systems Theory

Family systems theory largely originated from the work of Bowen (1978), a psychiatrist and family therapist who was key in the mid-twentieth century in reframing therapy toward treatment of the family as a system rather than focusing therapy only on the individual (Kott, 2014). Bowen incorporated ethology, evolutionary biology, and

neuroscience into his theory and suggested that his concepts were applicable to other group applications such as administrative organizations (Bowen, 1978; Kott, 2014). Using Bowen's systems theory in organizations, Chambers (2009) explained the impact around systemic anxiety, "The use of this thinking creates an awareness of fluctuations in anxiety in the work system and the methods individuals and groups employ to manage this" (p. 245). Bowen theory proposes eight key concepts, one of which is particularly relevant to the toxic triangle model—differentiation of self. Differentiation of self is "the ability for an individual to remain autonomous under group pressure" (Kott, 2014, p. 78). If a susceptible follower lacks self-differentiation, that could be an underlying mechanism that constrains the susceptible follower from exercising his or her full agency under the pressures of a destructive leader and conducive environment. This connection has not yet been directly tested.

Another particularly relevant concept from family systems theory is Friedman's (2007) concept of emotional fields, "environments of force that, for all their influence over people's thinking processes, were, like magnetic fields or gravitational fields, largely invisible to the naked eye" (p. 15). The underlying mechanisms may not be known, but the implication is that positive and negative emotions are contagious through an organization. This is consistent with studies on the costs of workplace incivility showing that 80% of workers lose time worrying about the incident and even *witnesses* to workplace incivility experience about 30% worse performance on routine and creative tasks (Porath & Erez, 2009; Porath & Pearson, 2010). Similarly, studies have tested family systems theory and found that self-differentiation does reduce stress and anxiety in individuals (Murdock & Gore, 2004; Peleg-Popko, 2002).

In addition to the concepts of self-differentiation and emotional fields, Friedman (2007) proposed a leadership model based on maintaining a non-anxious presence, staying connected even in disagreement, being non-reactive, managing triangles to reduce anxiety and promote safety and growth, and persisting in the face of sabotage (Cox, 2006). Applying family systems theory to the toxic triangle model from Padilla et al. (2007), Friedman's leadership model seems to point to the fact that destructive leaders are simply failing to lead well. That may be true, but Friedman (2007) also articulates the overfunctioning-underfunctioning polarity, which means "when someone is overfunctioning in a system, someone else is underfunctioning" and vice versa (Cox, 2006, p. 4). So in a two-way system where the emotional field is constantly held together and co-created by leaders and followers, Friedman's leadership model could also be applied to individual followers—even a susceptible follower. For example, Friedman (1990) uses a domino analogy to discuss the importance of self-differentiation in a system:

Imagine all the members of an organization as dominoes laid out standing up on the floor in an intricate pattern. All of a sudden, anxiety hits and one topples. The chain reaction starts. When the cascading reaches the leader domino, can it remain upright, differentiate itself so to speak, and thus stop being one of the system's emotional dominoes? (Cox, 2006, pp. 5-6)

In a toxic triangle, it is the positional leaders who are often generating the most anxiety and are, therefore, underfunctioning in that role of a leader, meaning the other two parties of the triangle—susceptible followers or the conducive environment—will need to overfunction in order to bring equilibrium to the system. One form of this is with the role

of “toxic handlers” or “organizational toxin handlers” who sacrifice themselves emotionally and physically for the health of the organization (Frost & Robinson, 1999; Gallos, 2008). No studies have yet been conducted on the systemic effects of having the followers in a toxic triangle system begin to exercise self-differentiation, maintain a non-anxious presence, be non-reactive, stay connected despite disagreement, and so on. One would expect that either the conducive environment or the destructive leader (or both) would move toward a more stable equilibrium and less volatile homeostasis. One relatively straightforward way of exercising the key aspects of Friedman’s leadership model is the practice of mindfulness.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is intentionally paying attention to the present in a nonjudgmental way (Kabat-Zinn, 1998). Though individuals may have different levels of mindfulness based on many natural factors (Brown & Ryan, 2003), studies such as Baer et al. (2008) and Falkenström (2010) show that mindfulness can be increased through meditation and mindfulness-based training.

Mindfulness has been studied extensively with numerous studies showing that increased mindfulness has positive effects on individual well-being such as higher levels of life satisfaction (Schutte & Malouff, 2011), better psychological well-being (Brown, Kasser, Ryan, Linley, & Orzech, 2009), better sleep quality (Howell, Digdon, Buro, & Sheptycki, 2008), and improved immune system functionality (Carlson, Speca, Patel, & Goodey, 2003). Particularly relevant to the susceptible follower types of Lost Souls and Bystanders (see Figure 3), individuals with higher levels of mindfulness tend to have a higher core self-evaluation (Kong, Wang, & Zhao, 2014). Core self-evaluation is a

dispositional trait composed of self-esteem, self-efficacy, locus of control, and neuroticism (Judge & Locke, 1998). In simple terms, core self-evaluation is a “bottom-line appraisal of one’s own worthiness, effectiveness, and capability” (Kong, Wang, & Zhao, 2014, p. 166).

The relationship between mindfulness and one’s compliance has not been directly tested or studied, where compliance can be understood as the acquiescence to any implicit or explicit request (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). However, some connections between mindfulness and compliance can be inferred. For example, a review of compliance research showed that compliance is driven by three central motivations: to be accurate, to affiliate, and to maintain a positive self-concept (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). The latter two are similar to Barbuto’s (2000) work on trigger influences on followers’ compliance (see Figure 2). Regarding the first motivation, Cialdini and Goldstein (2004) point out that the goal to be accurate is particularly important to targets of compliance-gaining attempts because “one inaccurate perception, cognition, or behavior could mean the difference between getting a bargain and being duped” (p. 592). On this very point, mindfulness has been shown to increase the accuracy of cognitive processes (Kiken & Shook, 2011). In this study, participants in the mindfulness condition demonstrated reduced negativity bias and “correctly classified positive and negative stimuli more equally than those in the control condition” (Kiken & Shook, 2011, p. 425).

With regards to the key concept of self-differentiation in family systems theory, there seems to be a direct relationship between mindfulness and self-differentiation, defined as “the ability for an individual to remain autonomous under group pressure” (Kott, 2014, p. 78). One study that lends credence is Levesque and Brown (2007), “This

research suggests that mindfulness may serve a de-automatization function, a term used to denote an ‘undoing’ of automatized processes” (p. 296). Since group pressure leverages automatic and learned processes and behaviors in followers, it seems that a de-automatization function such as mindfulness would increase one’s ability to differentiate oneself and remain autonomous. Similarly, Farb et al. (2007) conducted an experiment measuring brain activity in the medial prefrontal cortex in which the results suggested mindfulness training “enables the individual to differentiate previously inseparable streams in the flow of information in the mind” (Siegel, 2007, pp. 260-261). This finding in neuroscience shows alignment between mindfulness training and proponents of family systems theory who say it “promotes an individual’s capacity to respond to anxiety thoughtfully rather than reactively” and “discourages fused responses...with a focus on genuine problem-solving in the face of increasing anxiety” (Chambers, 2009, p. 245).

Finally, Dolan, Garcia, and Auerbach (2003) describe an increasing trend in organizations as “the need for professional autonomy and responsibility,” going so far as to say that “a professional without autonomy is not a real professional” (p. 28). Compared to other interventions, mindfulness is minimalistic enough to develop only the necessary pre-conditions in participants—and not much more beyond that—so that they are more able to utilize their own agency and autonomy to find best practices in their organizational context.

Summary

Most research to date has been primarily focused on the leader’s side of the toxic triangle, and more research is needed in the two areas of susceptible followers and conducive environments that both contribute to enabling, creating, and sustaining

destructive leadership. This literature review has shown that a sufficient framework and taxonomy have developed around susceptible followers to allow for action research to test the propositions made by Barbuto (2000) and Thoroughgood et al. (2012). Their propositions may be tested with interventions that decrease the likelihood of compliance, thereby increasing non-compliance in followers where destructive leaders are operating. Family systems theory proposes a leadership model based on differentiating self, staying connected even in disagreement, maintaining a non-anxious presence, being non-reactive, managing triangles, and persisting in the face of sabotage—practices which have been shown to benefit from mindfulness. Additionally, mindfulness seems to address many of the contributing environmental factors in a toxic triangle such as increasing the tolerance of uncertainty, lowering the power distance, or creating a culture of shared responsibility instead of apathy. Furthermore, since high levels of mindfulness are associated with two of the three central drivers of compliance—higher cognitive accuracy and higher core self-evaluation—it stands to reason that followers with increased mindfulness would display decreased compliance if the leaders' requests are harmful to the organization. Therefore, a mindfulness-based intervention seems to be an appropriate choice for this study. Finally, there are many variables that influence the outcome of follower compliance, many of which are unique to each individual follower. This study focuses on the two variables that are the most broadly applicable to the susceptible follower category of conformers (see Figures 2 and 3): a follower's level of resistance and core self-evaluation.

Chapter 3: Methods

This study examined the impact of an eight-week, free, online MBSR course on employees who self reported that they currently work under the supervision of a toxic leader. The study attempted to answer the question, “Can a free, online MBSR course reduce the negative impact of toxic leadership on the organization?”

This chapter consists of an outline of the research design, a description of the sample and intervention, an explanation of the measures used, an overview of the data analysis process, and a description of steps taken for the protection of human subjects.

Research Design

This study used an explanatory sequential mixed methods design in which quantitative research was first gathered and analyzed for results, and then qualitative research was conducted to explain the quantitative data results in more detail (Creswell, 2014, p. 15). Once participants were selected, quantitative data were gathered using the Anticipated Resistance Indicator (Barbuto, 1997), Compliance with Supervisor’s Wishes Scale (Rahim, 1988), and Core Self-Evaluations Scale (Judge, Amir, Bono, & Thoresen, 2003). After the data had been analyzed, an interview protocol (Appendix A) was created to elicit more details surrounding the results from the quantitative phase. Qualitative data were then collected from participants via one-on-one interviews either in person or by videoconference. Participation in an interview was optional. Qualitative data were also collected in the form of written journals throughout the eight-week MBSR course.

Sample

A snowball sampling method was utilized to recruit participants by posting a message on social media sites LinkedIn, Facebook, and Pepperdine University’s alumni

Yammer group (Appendix B). As a result, ten people volunteered to participate in the study. They were from organizations ranging in size from 10 to 45,000 and had been working under their perceived toxic leader anywhere from five months to six years (Table 2). In total, the data collected included 169 total journal entries, nine pre-study and post-study survey pairs, and four interviews, all of which were one-on-one (Table 3).

Table 2
Participants and Their Organizational Contexts

Participant	Company Size	Industry	Months Working for Toxic Leader	Interaction with Toxic Leader
A	45,000	Financial Activities	11	Daily
B	200	Health Services	24	1–5 times/week
C	50	Financial Activities	11	Daily
D	200	Educational Services	5	Daily
E	15	Other	60	4 times/week
F	50	Other	5	Daily
G	400	Professional Services	18	Daily
H	35	Other	72	Daily
I	10	Other	18	10 hrs/week
J	50	Financial Activities	30	Daily

Table 3
Summary of Data Collection

Type of Data	Data Collected
Pre-Study Survey	10 respondents (100% response rate)
Post-Study Survey	9 respondents (90% response rate)
Weekly Journals	6 of 10 participants (60% response rate) - Ranged from 1 to 7 weeks each - 31 weeks' worth of journals - 169 total journal entries
Interviews	4 out of 10 participants (40% response rate)

All participants were located in the domestic United States. Participants were instructed to subjectively decide for themselves whether or not their supervisor qualified

as a toxic leader based on two principles from the literature: (1) being a toxic leader is not a yes/no categorization but rather a broad spectrum, and (2) it can be either process-based or outcomes-based. For those participants who requested more concrete guidance, a list of common behaviors and outcomes was provided to them (Appendix C). In the pre-study survey, participants provided descriptions of observed behavior or results from their leader that, in their opinion, they considered toxic. Table 4 below shows a few examples to provide some organizational context of the study's participants.

Table 4
Sample Behaviors and Results of Participants' Supervisors

-
- Falsely blames others for his own delays
 - Does not care about other people's schedules
 - Expects emails to be answered on Saturdays and Sundays even when he sends them at midnight on a Sunday
 - Exclusion from team activities and decisions
 - Regularly speaks loudly and negatively to those around him
 - Condescending dialog, both in private, in public, and in front of clients
 - No genuine staff appreciation of efforts – takes full credit for a job well done by a team
 - Talks a lot and listens very little
 - When the deliverable is submitted it is torn apart in front of all direct reports as not meeting the standards he set out
 - Inappropriate comments about women (supervisor is a male)
 - Makes racist comments
 - Discriminates against employees for raises, promotions, and hiring
 - Moving targets to hit and never good enough
 - Does not have depth of knowledge of the area he supervises and will not listen to input
 - Encourages in-fighting online with direct reports
 - Does not communicate clearly and creates stress
 - Speaks in front of large groups inaccurately, leaving direct reports to fix the damage
 - Irritable – gets irritated when others bring issues and suggestions of a fix to his attention
 - Outbursts of anger with employees
 - Often sternly and in an elevated tone tells employees "NO!" or "YOU'RE WRONG!" during discussions
 - Spreading lies and rumors
 - Hiding relevant information
 - She makes me feel worthless
 - She talks about other employees to me in a negative way
 - I am micromanaged unnecessarily on projects
 - I have a hard time knowing what is and isn't appropriate because I have been given directions that could match either (e.g., "Don't work on your unscheduled work days" and "finish all of the work by the next time I see you")
 - Promises some things then denies ever saying them
-

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Program

The independent variable for this study was a free, online, eight-week MBSR program created by Dave Potter. Dave Potter's certification as an MBSR instructor is from the University of Massachusetts Medical School, and he has been practicing for over 12 years (Potter, 2018). To improve the user experience and increase the probability

of participants completing the self-paced course, a separate website was created (Cheng, 2018) to streamline the presentation of materials and include additional options of shorter mindfulness practices. The goal for including the shorter versions of guided meditations was to provide participants with a wide sample of mindfulness practices that could be easily done in as many settings as possible, not only in thirty-minute timeframes. The shorter versions of guided meditations were used by permission from the British Columbia Association for Living Mindfully (BCALM, 2018).

Measures

The study used an online survey to collect quantitative data. The survey was administered twice, once before the MBSR program and once after. The survey was a compilation of three different validated instruments to measure resistance, compliance, and core self-evaluations (Appendix D).

Anticipated Resistance Indicator (ARI). The ARI is a 5-item self-reported instrument with a 7-point Likert scale from Almost Never to Almost Always (Barbuto, 1997). Participants were asked to describe the nature of tasks assigned to them, and each question “is carefully worded to represent a concentric zone [of resistance] (Preference, Indifference, Legitimate, Influence, and Noninfluence)” (Barbuto, 2000, p. 617).

Compliance With Supervisor’s Wishes (CWS). The CWS is a 10-item self-reported instrument with a 5-point Likert scale that ranged from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree (Rahim, 1988). Participants are asked to rate the extent to which they do or prefer doing the things their superior wants them to do. Five out of the ten items are reverse-scored since they are worded in the negative. The CWS has an internal consistency reliability above 0.80 per Rahim and Buntzman (1989).

Core Self-Evaluations Scale (CSES). The CSES is a 12-item self-reported instrument with 5-point scales from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree and has an internal consistency reliability above 0.80 (Judge et al., 2003). Participants are asked to read a statement about themselves and indicate their agreement or disagreement. An example item is “I am capable of coping with most of my problems.” Six out of the 12 items are reverse-scored since they are worded in the negative.

In addition, the pre-study survey also collected data on the organization’s size and industry, nature of the participant’s role and how the role organizationally relates to their toxic supervisor, rate of interaction with the toxic supervisor, length of employment under the toxic supervisor, and descriptions of observed behavior or results that the participant considers toxic. The post-study survey also collected a self-reported estimation of the number of times participants practiced mindfulness each week with the various practices.

Data Analysis Procedures

Since it is unknown whether or not people’s resistance, compliance, or self-evaluation scores have a normal distribution, a Wilcoxon signed-ranks test was used to compare pre-MBSR and post-MBSR scores on the three different measures. For the qualitative data analysis, the interviews were transcribed and the data was coded and themed according to emergent patterns. The journal entries were analyzed in the same way. In addition to coding and categorizing themes, connecting strategies were used to identify cause and effect, taking into account “juxtaposition in time and space, the influence of one thing on another, or relations among parts of a text; their identification

involves seeing actual connections between things, rather than similarities and differences” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 106).

Protection of Human Subjects

Pepperdine University’s Institutional Review Board approved the proposed research study on March 7, 2018. The researcher also completed the training course, “MSOD Human Subjects Training,” offered by the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative Program on September 24, 2016 (Appendix E).

To protect the confidentiality of all research participants, the names of participants were obscured using pseudonyms and no company names were collected. The researcher administered the survey instruments via a secure online website and conducted face-to-face interviews either in person or via videoconferencing software. Prior to collecting any data from individual research participants, an informed consent form was presented (Appendix F). Any risk to the participants’ confidentiality was further mitigated by conducting the videoconference interviews after work hours where participants were encouraged to find a time and place where they had sufficient privacy. There was no cost to the participants to participate in this study nor was any financial incentive given for doing so. All participant responses were kept confidential, and no names or other identifying characteristics were written on any surveys or interview notes. The data were maintained securely in a password-protected folder in a password-protected computer and locked in a secured facility belonging to the researcher. The data will be kept in this location for three years following the study and then destroyed.

Summary

This chapter outlined the research design, sampling methodology, intervention design, measures, and data analysis procedures used to understand the degree to which mindfulness can reduce the negative impact of toxic leadership on an organization. This study used an explanatory sequential mixed methods design to analyze the change in participants' resistance, compliance, and core self-evaluation along with interviews and journal entries to further explore the impact on the organizational system. Chapter 4 will detail the data gathered as well as the overall research findings.

Chapter 4: Findings and Results

The purpose of this study was to answer the question, “Can a free, online Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction course reduce the negative impact of toxic leadership on the organization?” This chapter summarizes the analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data gathered. This chapter also presents the key themes, observed patterns of organizational influence, and overall findings of the study.

Findings from Resistance, Compliance, and Core Self-Evaluation Data

To answer the research question, both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered. The quantitative data measured the change in participants’ resistance, compliance, and core self-evaluation. A two-tailed Wilcoxon signed-ranks test indicated that the median post-test scores for resistance after the MBSR course were statistically significantly higher than the median pre-test scores ($Z = 2.07, p = 0.04$), indicating participants were *less resistant* to their supervisors after the eight-week MBSR course. When segmenting the data by individual zones of resistance, the largest changes were observed in the preference and indifference zones (Table 5). In analyzing the zones of resistance, a Wilcoxon signed-ranks test indicated that the median post-test scores were statistically significantly higher than the median pre-test scores for both the preference zone ($Z = 2.19, p = 0.03$) and indifference zone ($Z = 2.49, p = 0.01$). The higher post-test scores in these two zones indicate that, after the MBSR course, participants were *less resistant* to their supervisors regarding tasks that participants preferred or felt indifference toward. There was no statistically significant change in the other zones of legitimate, influence, and noninfluence.

Table 5
Simple Statistics and Sign-Ranked Comparison of Zones of Resistance

Zone	Pre-Study		Post-Study		Comparison			
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean Diff	Wilcoxon Signed Ranks (+)	Wilcoxon Signed Ranks (-)	<i>p</i>
Preference	2.8	1.2	3.6	1.9	0.8	24	-4	0.03*
Indifference	3.7	1.8	4.5	2.1	0.8	26.5	-1.5	0.01*
Legitimate	4.2	1.8	3.7	2.1	-0.5	20.5	-15.5	0.45
Influence	4.3	1.5	4.4	2.3	0.1	20	-8	0.10
Noninfluence	2.6	1.6	2.3	1.8	-0.3	15.5	-20.5	0.45

* $p < 0.05$, $N = 9$

Note: A higher score in Preference and Indifference indicates *less* resistance.

In the scores for the Compliance With Supervisor's Wishes instrument, a Wilcoxon signed-ranks test indicated there was no statistically significant change in compliance median post-test scores after the MBSR course compared to median pre-test scores. Similarly for the Core Self-Evaluations Scale, a Wilcoxon signed-ranks test indicated no statistically significant change in median post-test scores compared to median pre-test scores before the MBSR course.

Findings from Interviews and Journal Entries

The data from interviews and journal entries were coded and categorized. As themes emerged, the conceptual frameworks of family systems theory and the toxic triangle model proved to be particularly useful in naming most categories. When coding the interview transcripts, a narrative ID was used to differentiate unique narrative threads so that multiple comments with the same theme were only counted once if they shared the same narrative ID. This method of coding the qualitative data reduced the noise of repeated comments and revealed the presence of several themes regarding the impact of mindfulness on the organization (Table 6). A more expanded list can be found in Appendix G.

Table 6***Themes on the Impact of Mindfulness in a Toxic Triangle System (Abbreviated)***

Theme	Number of Comments	Example Quotes
Family Systems Theory	106	
- Differentiation of Self	40	- When you're okay with just letting yourself be yourself in that moment...
- Non-Anxious Presence	30	- It makes things seem not as heavy. - It makes things feel less overwhelming.
- Being Non-Reactive	24	- It's okay to take time to think before giving a response in a conversation.
- Emotional Field	7	- Those kinds of situations I think bond us because we're able to laugh together and able to be honest with each other and be respectful of each other.
- Staying connected despite disagreement	5	- You care more about the person than the positive relationship... The end goal is to be relational, not achieve a certain result.
Conducive Environments	35	
- Lower Power Distance	20	- I think it's great that you do speak up so people don't take advantage of you... They know that you have a voice.
- More Shared Responsibility	9	- We're both struggling to make this new situation work to the best of our abilities. And that meant working better as a team.
- More Individualism	2	- Just being okay having a voice, I guess.
- Less Uncertainty Avoidance	2	
- More Organizational Resources	2	
Susceptible Followers	24	
- Internal Self-Concept Clarity	13	- The calmer my heart, the more activity I tend to feel... As if, my personal well-being depends on how calm and happy my heart is.
- Internal Locus of Control	8	- Realizing... I have a lot of control in how I respond or react in interactions with that person.
- Less Self-Monitoring	3	- So it's less of a fear of "How is this person going to receive me and think of me?"
Miscellaneous	9	
- Previous initiatives	4	
- Beyond expectations	3	
- Highly reactive	1	
- No known impact	1	

To better visualize how the organization as a whole was impacted by mindfulness, the positive comments from journal entries and participant interviews were also coded according to how the participant influenced each of the toxic triangle segments in their organization, sometimes influencing more than one segment simultaneously. These were then mapped onto a Venn diagram to create a Toxic Triangle Influence Map for each participant, plus an overall aggregate map. For coding purposes, a “positive comment” is a quote that expresses a thought, feeling, or action that could reduce the negative impact of toxic leadership on the organization in ways aligned with the academic literature. Narrative IDs were again used to remove the noise of repeated comments regarding the same narrative thread. Notice how each Toxic Triangle Influence Map is unique, almost like a fingerprint.

Examining the Toxic Triangle Influence Maps revealed four distinct fingerprints: All-Around (Figure 4), Leader & Followers (Figure 5), Leader & Environment (Figure 6), and Follower Focused (Figure 7). Note that the Leader & Environment and Follower-Focused influence maps both include a significant amount of influence on their overlapping regions with the environment (36% and 31%, respectively) while totally excluding the overlapping region between leaders and followers (0%). It is interesting to note that the Leader & Followers influence map is from a participant who resigned from their company during the last week of the study, saying “I’m just trying to get through to my next job.” A key characteristic of this influence map is that almost zero positive comments were made about influencing the environment—only 3%—differentiating it from the other three influence maps where the range is 31%–47%. Finally, the All-Around influence map has two distinguishing characteristics: (1) influence is widely

distributed—all three toxic triangle segments have percentages of 33% or higher—and (2) the “Relevant only to Participant” percentage was significantly low (13%) compared to the other three influence maps where those comments ranged from 38%–43%. This does not mean Participant B was any less impacted by the MBSR program; it simply means Participant B’s reported takeaways were more often *in relation to the organizational system* rather than in isolation.

Figure 4
Toxic Triangle Influence Map for Participant B (“All-Around”)

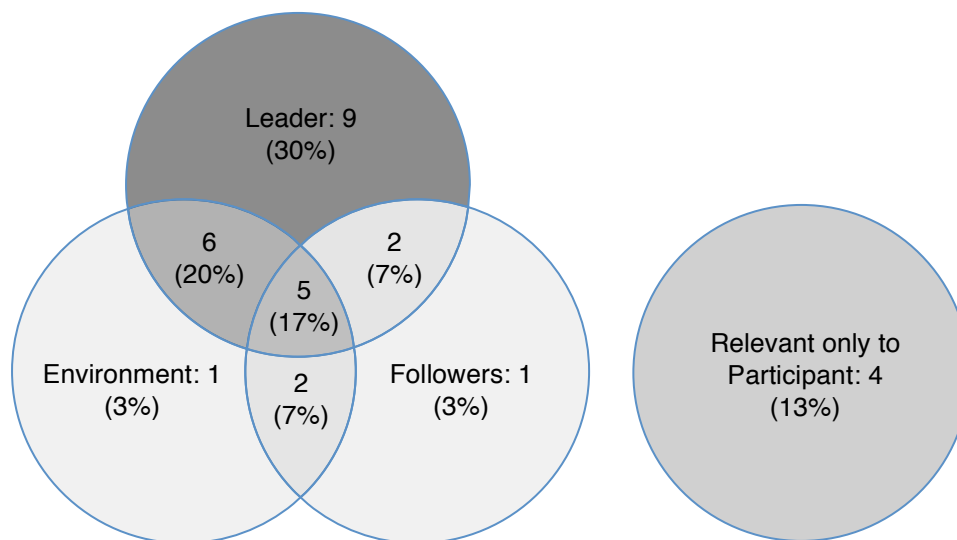


Figure 4. Positive comments from Participant B, shaded by percentage. “All-Around” has 33% or higher for every category: Leader, Envir., and Followers.

Figure 5
Toxic Triangle Influence Map for Participant C (“Leader & Followers”)

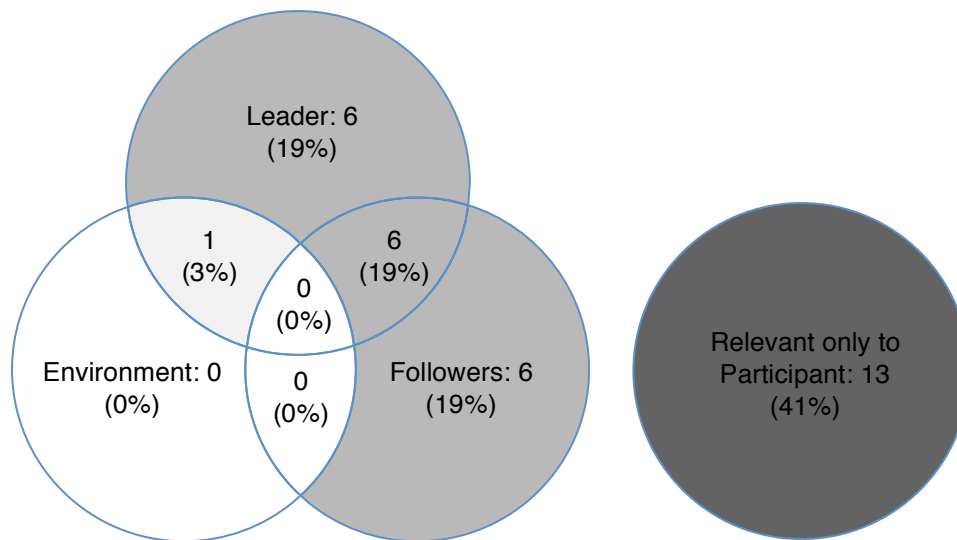


Figure 5. Positive comments from Participant C, shaded by percentage. “Leader & Followers” due to >33% in Leader (41%) and Followers (38%).

Figure 6

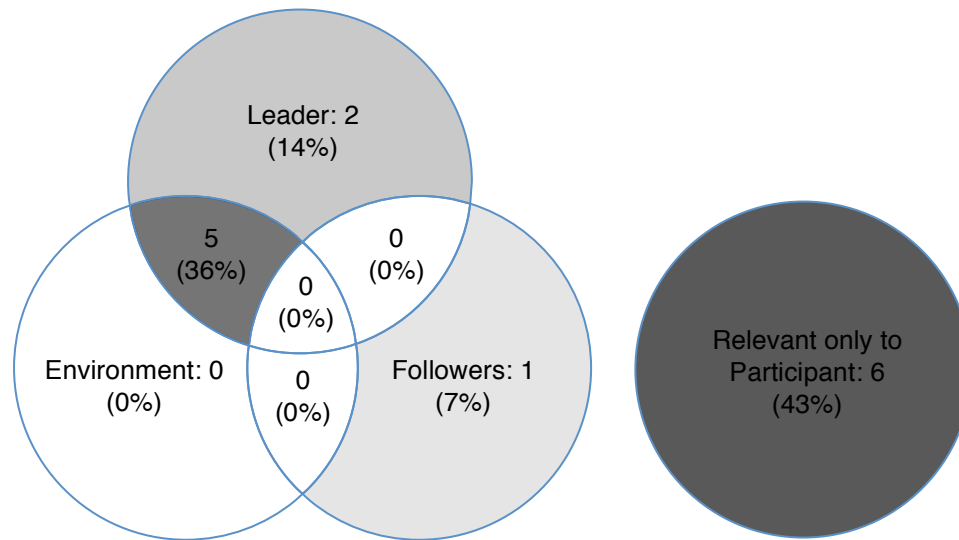
Toxic Triangle Influence Map for Participant F (“Leader & Environment”)

Figure 6. Positive comments from Participant F, shaded by percentage. “Leader & Environment” because >33% in both Leader (50%) and Environment (36%).

Figure 7

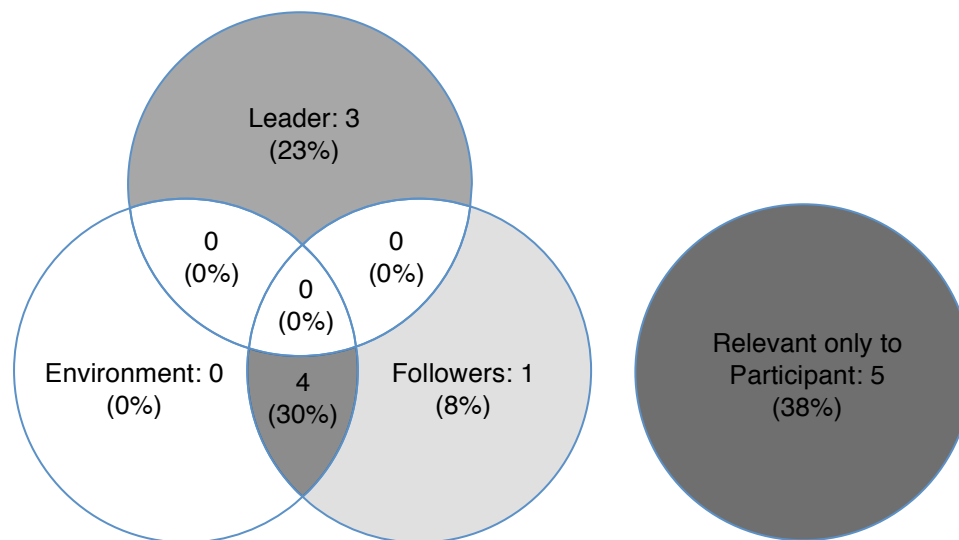
Toxic Triangle Influence Map for Participant H (“Follower Focused”)

Figure 7. Positive comments from Participant H, shaded by percentage. “Follower Focused” because >33% in only Followers (38%).

Figure 8
Overall Impact of Mindfulness on the Toxic Triangle

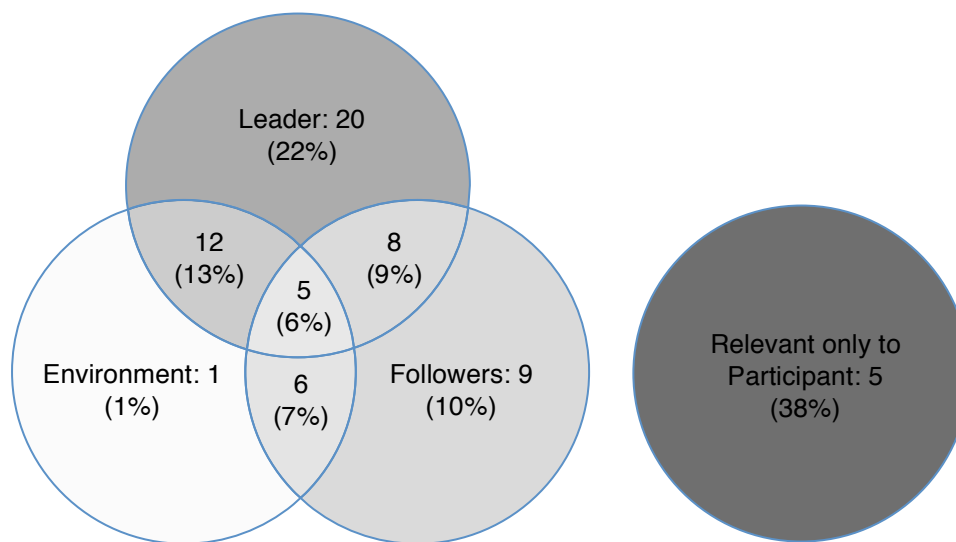


Figure 8. Toxic Triangle Influence Map for participants B, C, F, and H, aggregated. Darker regions indicate a greater percentage of positive comments.

The data from the Venn diagrams were also summarized by each circle, with all positive comments categorized using the toxic triangle model—destructive leader, conducive environment, and susceptible followers—as well as any comments that were only relevant to the participant alone (Table 7). When viewed this way, the distribution of comments varied greatly by participant: Participant B (All Around) had the greatest percentage of positive comments in relation to the Leader with 73%; Participant C (Leader & Followers) had the least percentage of comments on Environment with 3%; Participant F (Leader & Environment) had the least percentage of comments on Followers at 7%; and Participant H (Follower Focused) had the most even distribution of comments between all four segments. When aggregated, the destructive leader received the most positive comments with 51% of the total.

Table 7
Summary of Positive Comments by Toxic Triangle Segment

Segments	Participants									
	B		C		F		H		Overall	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Leader	22	73%	13	41%	7	50%	3	23%	45	51%
Environment	14	47%	1	3%	5	36%	4	31%	24	27%
Followers	10	33%	12	38%	1	7%	5	38%	28	31%
Participant Only	4	13%	13	41%	6	43%	5	38%	28	31%

Summary

This chapter presented the overall findings of the study including key themes and observed patterns of organizational influence. In addition to finding themes that were largely aligned with family systems theory and the toxic triangle model, Toxic Triangle Influence Maps were created to better visualize the impact on the organization as a whole. Chapter 5 will detail the researcher's conclusions about the data, implications for theory and practice, the study's limitations, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5: Conclusions, Recommendations, and Summary

This study examined the research question, “Can a free, online MBSR course reduce the negative impact of toxic leadership on the organization?” The original hypothesis was that the MBSR course would reduce the negative impact of toxic leadership on the organization. In the quantitative data, this was expected to manifest as increased resistance, decreased compliance, and increased core self-evaluations. In the qualitative data, it was hypothesized that mindfulness habits would allow each participant to find their own new ways of reducing the negative impact of toxic leadership on their organization that uniquely fit their personal and organizational context. This chapter presents a discussion of the study results including conclusions, recommendations, study limitations, and recommendations for future study.

Conclusions on Resistance and Compliance

The quantitative data collected on employees indicated that the MBSR course did not have any significant impact on participants’ compliance with their supervisors and, on the contrary, participants’ resistance to their supervisors *decreased*. While these results do not support the researcher’s original hypothesis, they do shed light on an important overlooked consideration. The original hypothesis was based on the premise that a more mindful follower would exercise more agency in the form of resisting and refusing to comply with *unethical requests* from a destructive leader, thus reducing the negative impact on the organization. However, that premise assumes the leaders in this study were making unethical requests. As seen in Table 4, the leaders in this study were not perceived by their employees as being toxic for unethical requests but rather for interpersonal and communication issues. With interpersonal issues, it makes sense that

resistance and compliance would be less of a factor than if the follower were being asked to perform unethical tasks such as, say, breaking the law.

The finding that participants after the MBSR course were less resistant in their preference and indifference zones could be a reflection of how much the leaders' ineffective interpersonal skills were counterproductively making employees less willing to complete tasks, even tasks that they prefer doing. It makes sense that after the MBSR course—when participants are able to reliably practice skills such as non-anxious presence and being non-reactive to their leaders' poor interpersonal and communication skills—the participants would be less resistant to task requests in the preference and indifference zones. Assuming the leaders in this study were not making unethical requests, this finding supports the study's main hypothesis that a free, online MBSR course can reduce the negative impact of toxic leadership on the organization. By reducing employees' resistance to (assumed ethical) task requests in the preference and indifference zones, unnecessary friction is reduced between the leader and followers, and productivity should theoretically increase.

Conclusions on Core Self-Evaluations

The quantitative data collected on employees indicated that the MBSR course did not have any statistically significant impact on participants' core self-evaluation scores between pre-test and post-test. At first glance, this seems like a reasonable finding considering that the MBSR course was online and self-paced with limited accountability and no in-person instructor. That was an intentional design choice to test the lower limit threshold of how little exposure to mindfulness is required to produce a significant change in one's core self-evaluation. Therefore, this finding would seem to indicate that

in order to significantly increase core self-evaluations through mindfulness practices, it would take more exposure than an online, self-paced MBSR program with no accountability. However, I believe this result is directly due to the small sample size. Upon closer inspection, almost all CSES scores increased except for one major outlier. If this single major outlier were excluded, a two-tailed Wilcoxon signed-ranks test would indicate a statistically significant positive increase in CSES scores ($Z = 2.10, p = 0.04$). The only way to draw a more confident conclusion would be to expand the study to a larger sample size. In addition, a larger sample size would allow for comparisons between participants who completed a majority of the course versus those who did not.

The finding from the CSES instrument did not support the hypothesis that core self-evaluation scores would increase, most likely due to the large margin of error associated with a small sample size. That being said, the analysis of the qualitative data did indicate positive effects on internal locus of control, self-esteem, and self-efficacy, all sub-traits of core self-evaluation, though none were measured quantitatively. The sections below discuss conclusions from the qualitative data in more detail.

Impact on the Toxic Triangle

This study's research question was, "Can a free, online MBSR course reduce the negative impact of toxic leadership on the organization?" The analysis of the interviews and journal entries provided insights on how the organization was impacted. To analyze the impact on the organization, it will be discussed as a toxic triangle system.

Conducive environments are less conducive. The conducive environment had 35 comments in unique narrative threads that reflected a participant actively working to make the environment less conducive to destructive leadership (Appendix G). Of these

efforts, the top two categories were in lowering power distance and having more shared responsibility. These categories address two of the four conducive environment factors described in the literature as important enablers of destructive leadership: specific cultural dimensions and absence of checks and balances (Padilla et al., 2007). To name the specific cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 1991), Padilla et al. (2007) provide a list of avoidance of uncertainty, collectivism (as opposed to individualism), and high power distance, all three of which were addressed by participants. Examples included speaking up “clearly and loudly” to the leader, being vocal about challenges in the workplace, and feeling safe enough to be honest. One participant said about mindfulness, “Because I’ve given myself the OK that I’m frustrated, I feel more safe in expressing that frustration, whether or not the party on the other end is okay with it.”

In regards to the absence of checks and balances in a conducive environment, the literature suggests that it can arise from a culture of dependence and apathy in followers, and a culture of shared responsibility would be the antithesis of that (Padilla et al., 2007). Since having more shared responsibility was the sixth most commented category overall, there is evidence that this conducive environment factor was positively impacted as a result of the MBSR course. A good example of this shared responsibility is when a participant was getting a new boss, and mindfulness helped them to intentionally be more proactive: “I need to set the ground work for a healthy relationship between me and this new boss. So what does that look like? That looks like me communicating more, me initiating more, me taking on responsibility more.” They continued, “Finding out how I can help and then taking that on whether or not I was comfortable doing so or not.” Here, they are demonstrating the opposite of dependence and apathy.

Another piece of data regarding conducive environments is in the area of organizational resources. According to Keashly (2001), organizational resources include workplace policies, effective implementation of policy, and coworker and supervisory support. The following comment depicts how, in particular, coworker support was increased as a direct result of the participant trying new behaviors inspired by mindfulness: “We're able to laugh together and able to be honest with each other and be respectful of each other....She knows that it's safe to be honest with me, and I know that it's safe to be honest with her.”

All of these are examples of how the MBSR course enabled participants to think, feel, and behave in new ways that addressed key environmental factors. These changes are in alignment with the literature in making the workplace a less conducive environment for destructive leadership to occur.

Susceptible followers are less susceptible. There are 24 comments in unique narrative threads that demonstrate participants are less frequently exhibiting the character traits associated with susceptible followers and are often behaving in the exact opposite direction (Table 6). In particular, Thoroughgood et al. (2012) propose that the susceptible follower conformer types of Lost Souls and Bystanders are more susceptible to influence triggers from destructive leaders due to low self-concept clarity, low core self-evaluation (including an external locus of control), high self-monitoring, and low extraversion and dominance (Figure 3). In these four traits, multiple participants' comments demonstrated movement in the opposite direction.

With self-concept clarity, an example is this comment, “I think since the study...I think it's helped in me being more aware of like, ‘No, this is definitely something I want

to work on.’ ” Another participant described a personal epiphany during the MBSR course, “I’m genuine to my work. I actually like it. And I don’t let the other stuff get in my way.”

With internal locus of control, a sub-trait of core self-evaluations, participants exhibited both control over emotions as well as behaviors at work. An example of having an internal locus of control over emotions is when one participant said, “I learned that I could control my nervousness through my mind.” An example of a participant using mindfulness to control both their mental process and work behavior is this: “It actually seems like I just filter out all the crap that goes on at work...and [colleagues] said that, in particular, the way that I respond to the seniors, the choosing especially of interests, it seems positive.” Another good example of internal locus of control is when a participant described how the MBSR has resulted in their new way of relating to their boss, “I don’t let it escalate...I’m able to kind of pull myself back.”

Regarding self-monitoring behaviors, the following are several examples from before the MBSR course:

- “In the past, I wouldn’t even speak up...I didn’t want to get in trouble for anything that I might say...”
- “Will I get fired if I say something wrong?”
- “Will this person not like me if I say something that rubs him the wrong way?”
- “A fear of, ‘How is this person going to receive me and think of me?’”

After the MBSR course, these participants expressed a change, saying, “I found myself more comfortable being direct,” and, “It’s less of a fear of how this person is going to receive me and think of me, [and] more of how can I make sure that I’m being clear on

what I'm communicating.” Also, “My jaws wouldn't be as clenched, and I just brush it aside knowing it isn't my fault and that I didn't do anything wrong.” All of these examples display less self-monitoring as a result of new thinking, feelings, and behaviors from the MBSR course.

Regarding increased extraversion and dominance, here is an example of thinking prior to the MBSR course: “Oh, it's not worth it. I'm too scared of confrontation.” That is a sharp contrast to the participant describing a later work experience, “I was really surprised when I said those words and verbalized it...I had never said that to her before, and I think she was also kind of taken aback.” The participant was speaking up to their supervisor about a challenge at work. As a result, their work relationship became more “straightforward” and “honest” with each other. Increased extraversion and dominance can also sound like honesty, “...working on being honest with other people and communicating clearly.” Another participant described finding strategic opportunities during their own personal time and then bringing them to the supervisor's awareness. A further example of extraversion and dominance was, somewhat counterintuitively, based on openness and humility: “My approach was mostly, ‘How can I correct my misperception?’ because it could be me, not her...I had never approached things that way before, believe it or not.” This determination to try such a new approach is an expression of extraversion and dominance.

All of the above examples illustrate how the MBSR course enabled participants to think, feel, and behave in new ways. Their reported old ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving were aligned with many of the character traits associated with susceptible

followers in the literature, and their new ways run counter to them. The data indicates that these susceptible followers are less susceptible as a result of the MBSR course.

It is important to note that this conclusion is specifically for the conformer types of Lost Souls and Bystanders. The character traits for the third conformer type, Authoritarians, were not observed in the qualitative data analysis (e.g., cognitive rigidity, just world thinking, and authoritarianism). Likewise, this study did not look at the colluder types, the Acolytes and Opportunists (Figure 3). A final consideration is that even though these susceptible follower types are listed as distinct categories, Thoroughgood et al. (2012) explicitly state that they “do not assume that these follower categories are orthogonal” (p. 910) and suggest future studies are needed to test that hypothesis.

Implications for Practice

Destructive leadership in an organization seems like a “wicked problem,” sharing many criteria with the list proposed by Rittel and Webber (1973): (1) a clear problem statement cannot be defined (each stakeholder describes different root causes), (2) there are no “stopping rules” where the problem can be considered “fully solved,” (3) solutions are not true-or-false but rather good-or-bad or better-or-worse, (4) there is no immediate or ultimate test of a solution, and (5) the causes can be explained in numerous ways. As a result, the issue of destructive leadership can seem too systemically entrenched to effectively address without breaking and rebuilding the entire system from scratch. As a way of moving forward, the following sections summarize four key lessons learned about using mindfulness to reduce the negative impact of destructive leadership on an

organization. All four lessons point to addressing the organization as a whole, interconnected system in order to achieve better organizational outcomes.

Mindfulness for employees influences the whole system. When a single employee takes an MBSR course, positive influences can extend into the entire toxic triangle: the environment, the leader, and other followers. Examples of positive influences from the study include clearer communication, increased communication, more honesty, less anxiety, more shared responsibility, lower power distance, more psychological safety, and more strategic thinking. This implies that with enough followers exercising mindfulness, the entire system may reach a tipping point where people begin making healthy organizational changes internally, albeit without much fanfare. This approach stands in stark contrast to cases such as the massive fraud at Theranos, the 3.5 million fake accounts at Wells Fargo, or the leadership and harassment problems at Uber, where a major public scandal was the stimulus that brought about the necessary (and costly) changes (Egan, 2017; Newcomer & Stone, 2018; O'Brien, 2018). A known best practice in effective change management is to gather enough stakeholder commitment and momentum to overcome resistance to the needed changes (Prosci, 2014, pp. 19-21). Since mindfulness influences all parts of the toxic triangle system, it could be a less costly and more productive way of gathering organizational commitment and momentum than waiting for a scandal to occur.

Mindfulness creates a custom fit for each organization. VUCA is an acronym for volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity that originated in the U.S. military (Whiteman, 1998) and is frequently used to describe the world, including business. In today's VUCA business environment, there is no "one size fits all" solution or policy.

Every organization needs custom solutions that address its unique organizational context and challenges. That organizational context includes mission, values, goals, strategy, structure, processes, rewards, market forces, culture, and its people and their personalities, to name a few. How does one take into account all of these numerous factors before selecting an intervention to reduce the negative impact of destructive leadership? This study showed that mindfulness is an intervention that uniquely equips each participant to self-select their own approach, sometimes consciously and other times unconsciously, customizing their impact based on their own knowledge of themselves and the organizational context.

Each interviewed participant produced a different Toxic Triangle Influence Map as unique as a fingerprint, demonstrating how each participant leveraged their own personal resources (e.g., personality, skills, experience, areas of needed growth, knowledge of processes and group dynamics) and responded in their own way to the organizational context, focusing their influence on a combination of self, leader, other followers, and environment. For example, one participant intentionally used sarcasm with their perceived toxic leader that surprisingly changed their entire relationship from “bitterness” to “joking” and from “actively trying to stand in the way” to “mutual regard for one another.” This same use of sarcasm would not necessarily work with the other participants due to different personalities, culture, and other numerous factors.

Mindfulness as an intervention allows each employee to be a positive systemic influence in ways that match their readiness, comfort level, and role within the organization. It is very well aligned with complexity theory, allowing the entire system to operate closer

“on the edge of chaos” without becoming too stable or too chaotic where either would be unsustainable (Burnes, 2005; Dolan et al., 2003).

Mindfulness strengthens work relationships. This study found multiple instances of participants mentioning work relationships becoming more “positive” and “genuine” as a result of new actions and mindsets from the MBSR course. One example of this is how a participant reported mentally reframing a colleague from “an enemy” to “a friend.” This result aligns with studies on organizational effectiveness such as building psychological safety and trust for effective teams (Duhigg, 2016; Edmondson, 1999). This includes the positive follower-to-follower interactions discussed in more detail below.

Family systems theory provides a useful leadership framework. This study showed that family systems theory, particularly Friedman’s (2007) leadership model, is well suited for application in toxic triangle systems. In all of the data, family systems theory had a total of 106 positive comments whereas the second most commented category was conducive environments with 35 comments—a difference of 200%. Emotional fields, differentiation of self, maintaining a non-anxious presence, being non-reactive, and staying connected despite disagreement are all concepts found in family systems theory that were reported by multiple participants in the study. In addition, the overfunctioning-underfunctioning polarity provides a helpful framework in understanding how the perceived toxic leader is underfunctioning in the ways listed above, thereby causing the followers to overfunction at unsustainable levels, resulting in physical health problems, lower productivity, high turnover, and so on. As Cox (2006) points out, “Overfunctioning toward others means underfunctioning toward oneself” (p.

4). This study showed that the MBSR course did, indeed, allow followers to more sustainably function as leaders in terms of Friedman's leadership model, both toward themselves and toward others. This then allowed at least one perceived toxic leader to move toward a healthier level of functioning. The participant described this change as "very surprising" and explained, "I didn't see that coming...I expected the relationship to just be constantly bitter and her standing in the way of my progress of anything I did." The relationship is now "like misery loves company in a comedic kind of way...hahaha," and the participant describes it as "less caustic," "a tone of being slightly comedic," "struggling together," and "having mutual regard for one another." This is merely one way that family systems theory provides a useful leadership framework for organizations in a toxic triangle situation.

Implications for Theory

Follower-to-Follower Interactions. Thoroughgood et al. (2012) expressed interest in future research examining follower-to-follower interactions, writing that they "are unaware of any studies examining the interpersonal dynamics within the susceptible circle itself, which may further allow destructive leaders to thrive in various organizations," (p. 910) and then naming the passivity of bystanders as a hypothetical example of how unethical orders could be implicitly justified to other susceptible followers. Though not a primary focus, this study showed that the MBSR course resulted in multiple instances where susceptible followers (the participants) had a positive influence on other followers.

In particular, multiple participants mentioned instances where colleagues were impacted by the participant's new behaviors. For example, one participant said, "The

reaction to me being honest with other people and me working on being honest with other people and communicating clearly is that they now feel safe to do that with me as well,” whereas before the MBSR course, “I felt like [my colleague] wouldn't tell me what she was thinking. It felt like pulling teeth.” Other examples are when participants were noticed by their colleagues for demonstrating more extraversion and dominance, more internal locus of control, more self-concept clarity, or less self-monitoring and then were pursued as a role model. For example, one participant recalled when colleagues told the participant they had difficulty communicating frustrations at work in a professional manner, saying, “I don't know. I just act out... We don't know how to do that [like you].” These colleagues described the participant's approach as “very professional,” “respectful,” and “great that you're able to express that.” Another participant reported that their colleagues told them, “I need to be less snarky, be like you, in this situation,” and they have begun approaching them and calling for advice more often. These initial results imply that mindfulness can be a useful intervention in examining future research on follower-to-follower interactions within a toxic triangle.

Compliance is not the most important variable to measure. Existing literature focuses on compliance because the research is focused on the extreme end of the destructive leadership spectrum which includes unethical or illegal behavior. More towards the middle of the spectrum, where destructive leaders are being ethical yet harmful, compliance is not the most important variable to measure. For example, if the leader is making legitimate business requests but constantly berates, yells, and puts down others, then compliance from followers is almost a non-issue. Instead, being non-reactive or practicing differentiation of self may result in healthier benefits for both the

individuals and the organization than merely non-compliance, especially if the requests are completely ethical. Some examples of benefits are less stress and anxiety in the work environment, higher productivity, lower turnover rates, less absenteeism, a less conducive environment to further destructive leadership, and so on. For example, one benefit that this study uncovered was an increase in strategic thinking due to the MBSR course.

Multiple participants mentioned aspects of strategic thinking such as “taking moments to kind of think further ahead,” “seeing the bigger picture,” thinking ahead “for the next ‘x’ many years,” or suggesting new investment opportunities for the company. Rather than being related to compliance, these benefits were related to differentiation of self and maintaining a non-anxious presence. I would recommend measuring compliance only for studies where unethical requests are being made.

Recommendations and Limitations

One of the limitations of this study was the small sample size of ten participants. This resulted in four interviews with only three participants fully completing the self-paced MBSR course by submitting weekly journals for all eight weeks. This small sample size limits the power of statistical tests in analyzing the quantitative data, and it limits the confidence level of conclusions drawn from patterns and themes observed in the qualitative data. This limitation arose from the challenge of finding voluntary participants for the study. In addition, these participants most likely had some combination of traits associated with Bystanders and Lost Souls such as low self-concept clarity, external self-concept, low core self-evaluation, external locus of control, personal life distress, unmet basic needs, and so on (Thoroughgood et al., 2012). Those characteristic traits, combined with stressful working conditions under a perceived toxic

leader, did not make it easy for participants to fully complete the self-paced MBSR course. In future research, a larger sample size could accommodate this natural attrition rate, and then analysis could be conducted to compare participants who completed a majority of the MBSR course versus those who did not. Future research could also explore having multiple participants per organization, thereby allowing a Toxic Triangle Influence Map to be generated for each organization and analyzed on an organizational level with unique organization “fingerprints,” not just at the follower level. Doing so could test the hypothesis that mindfulness enables individuals to take actions uniquely and appropriately tailored to each organization’s context and needs.

Another study limitation is the potential for participant selection bias due to using the snowball sampling method via social media sites like Facebook and LinkedIn. By asking for volunteers in this way, it created the potential for participant selection bias to occur since those participants who volunteered may have already been on the higher end of the spectrum in terms of being more outgoing, more solution oriented, and possessing enough self-awareness and readiness to recognize their own toxic environment and act on it. It is not known how, or if at all, this affected participants’ resistance, compliance, and core self-evaluation scores.

A third limitation is that this study only shows how the MBSR course had resulting *influences* on the toxic triangle segments of the organization rather than actual impact in outcomes. Furthermore, the qualitative data in the form of interviews and journal entries limits the data to only that which is consciously observable to participants. This makes it almost impossible to examine second-degree and third-degree influences, such as if a participant inspires a colleague to try a new approach to working with their

own supervisor, for example. Future research could address this limitation by measuring various indicators of organizational health (e.g., psychological safety, employee engagement, actual business outcomes or KPIs, new processes or policies created) to better understand the actual impact of mindfulness on a toxic triangle beyond influences.

A final limitation is that this study did not attempt to verify the theoretical foundation of the susceptible followers and their key characteristics nor did the study attempt to categorize participants as specific susceptible follower types, though most appeared to exhibit characteristics of conformers rather than colluders. Future research could explore the impact of mindfulness on each susceptible follower type, particularly the colluder types: Acolytes and Opportunists. Would mindfulness result in colluders working even more proactively to sustain the toxic triangle, further entrenching and promoting their own interests to the detriment of others? And what effects would mindfulness have on the conformer type of Authoritarians? The connections of mindfulness to just world thinking, cognitive rigidity, and authoritarianism are less clear.

Summary

The cost of toxic leadership is estimated to be in the millions *per organization* (Porath & Pearson, 2010). It includes lost employees, lost customers, and lost productivity. Furthermore, toxic leadership tends to sustain itself as an entrenched system, illustrated well by the toxic triangle.

In response, authors of management books and blogs often write lines such as “the organization needs to speak up” to address toxic work environments, as if an organization were a physical entity capable of thoughts and actions. In reality, an organization is a non-physical social construct that simply stands for a group of people. It

is ultimately *people* who need to take action to bring about change in toxic work environments, and people are influenced by emotions such as fear, anxiety, manipulation, and so on. In this context, family systems theory provides a useful leadership framework in how it emphasizes the role of human agency and how human agency is affected by emotional fields and anxiety in the system. In any organization, the people exist in a system that is not merely mechanical with processes and an org chart but also emotional with positive and negative emotions interacting to either encourage or inhibit human agency to varying degrees.

This study shows that mindfulness allows each person to exercise more of their own agency in order to have the amount of impact with which they are comfortable, based upon their personality, readiness level, life experiences, etc. As one participant described it, “I can choose to ignore this and move on without this person further inhibiting me. It was a sense of separation to the toxic situation.” That ability to internally separate oneself from a toxic situation is an example of how human agency can be increased in a toxic environment. As Viktor Frankl reportedly said, “Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom” (Garson, 2018). Increasing human agency and freedom is the only way we will see positive change in toxic organizations, not by admonishing the metaphorical organizations themselves to “speak up.” This pilot study seems to indicate that mindfulness holds great promise to do just that. With enough human agency and self-awareness over time, maybe the people in the toxic triangle will change the system itself from the inside out.

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Appendix A: Group Interview Protocol

Appendix A: Group Interview Protocol

1. Before I begin with my questions, do you have any questions for me?

2. What have you noticed about yourself since the start of this study?

3. What have you noticed about working with your supervisor (the toxic one) since you began this study? (Anything else...? Repeat as needed.)

4. Since this study started, have you taken any new approaches to working under your supervisor that you would consider were successful?

5. What made you try these new approaches? (How did you get that idea, why did you decide to do it...)

6. It's clear that mindfulness may have an effect on you. What, if any, have been the effects of your 8 weeks of mindfulness on your colleagues? (What's the feedback you've noticed, either verbal or nonverbal?) How about with your supervisor?

7. Any other general thoughts on how doing mindfulness was helpful or not?

Appendix B: Recruitment Letter

Appendix B: Recruitment Letter

Subject Line: Opportunity to participate in a study on Toxic Leadership in organizations

Hello,

I am seeking volunteers to participate in a study on toxic leaders, focused on those who work for them. If you think you work under the direct supervision of a toxic leader (minimum of 4 months) and would like to participate, then please contact me!

Over the last 50 years, much research has been conducted on toxic leaders, but relatively few studies have been conducted on those who work under their supervision. My study will be conducted over 8 weeks on your own time in a self-paced manner beginning mid-March and ending mid-May. There is no financial compensation for participation in this study, but the results will contribute to the greater good of building a body of research around inoculating organizations against the negative effects of toxic leaders.

If you are interested or have questions, email me confidentially at gary.cheng@pepperdine.edu. Due to the sensitive nature of this research topic, strict confidentiality will be maintained. Please feel free to tell any friends who may be struggling with a toxic leader as their supervisor at work.

There is a limited number of research spots open, and the deadline to notify me of your interest is Sunday, March 18.

Best regards,

Gary Cheng

Appendix C: Common Toxic Behaviors and Outcomes

Appendix C: Common Toxic Behaviors and Outcomes

The following are compiled from Schyns & Schilling (2013) and Shaw et al. (2011).

Potential behaviors/characteristics of a toxic leader:

- *Drastically changes his/her demeanor when his/her supervisor is present
- *Denies responsibility for mistakes made in his/her unit
- *Will only offer assistance to people who can help him/her get ahead
- *Accepts credit for successes that do not belong to him/her
- *Acts only in the best interest of his/her next promotion
- *Ridicules subordinates
- *Holds subordinates responsible for things outside their job descriptions
- *Is not considerate about subordinates' commitments outside of work
- *Speaks poorly about subordinates to other people in the workplace
- *Publicly belittles subordinates
- *Reminds subordinates of their past mistakes and failures
- *Tells subordinates they are incompetent
- *Has explosive outbursts
- *Allows his/her current mood to define the climate of the workplace
- *Expresses anger at subordinates for unknown reasons
- *Allows his/her mood to affect his/her vocal tone and volume
- *Varies in his/her degree of approachability
- *Causes subordinates to try to "read" his/her mood
- *Affects the emotions of subordinates when impassioned
- *Has a sense of personal entitlement
- *Assumes that he/she is destined to enter the highest ranks of my organization
- *Thinks that he/she is more capable than others
- *Believes that he/she is an extraordinary person
- *Thrives on compliments and personal accolades
- *Controls how subordinates complete their tasks
- *Invades the privacy of subordinates
- *Does not permit subordinates to approach goals in new ways
- *Will ignore ideas that are contrary to his/her own
- *Is inflexible when it comes to organizational policies, even in special circumstances
- *Determines all decisions in the unit whether they are important or not
- *My boss places brutal pressure on subordinates
- *Anyone who challenges my boss is dealt with brutally
- *My boss does NOT have a clue what is going on in our business unit
- *My boss does not care about things happening in other units
- *My boss lies a lot
- *My boss often acts in an unethical manner
- *My boss often takes credit for the work that others have done
- *My boss blames others for his/her own mistakes
- *My boss is a micro-manager

- *My boss attempts to exert total control over everyone
- *I rarely know what my boss expects of me
- *I often have to guess what my boss really expects of me
- *My boss will tell superiors what they want to hear
- *You can rarely predict how my boss is likely to behave
- *You never know from day to day how my boss will behave
- *Very few people see my boss as a credible manager
- *My boss has a very poor reputation in our organization
- *My boss has lost credibility with stakeholders
- *My boss has personal favorites
- *My boss rarely seeks opinions from a wide variety of people
- *My boss avoids having to use new technology

Another way to look at it: “What effect does it have on me?”

*Physical ill health

-e.g., illness, sleeplessness, fatigue, headaches, heart palpitations, depression, ulcers, pneumonia, heart disease, weakened immune system, back and joint pain, loss of appetite

*Psychological /emotional health

-self-esteem
 -cynicism, distrust
 -anxiety, nervous, job-related tension
 -depressed mood
 -quickness to anger, resentment
 -helplessness or powerlessness
 -distorted judgments
 -a “hardened” feeling
 -increased alcohol use
 -thoughts of suicide

*Job-related

-decreased job satisfaction
 -decreased performance
 -decreased work effort or quality
 -decreased commitment to the organization
 -distraction, decreased concentration
 -absenteeism, increased sick leave
 -lost work time worrying about the person or an incident with them
 -lost time avoiding the person
 -turnover
 -transfer
 -intent to or thinking of leaving
 -decreased communication with superiors and coworkers

Appendix D: Pre-Study and Post-Study Surveys

Appendix D: Pre-Study and Post-Study Surveys

Pre-Study Survey

Q1

Welcome

This survey should take you around 10 minutes to complete. Your responses will be kept completely confidential. If you would like to contact the Principal Investigator in the study, please e-mail Gary Cheng at gary.cheng@pepperdine.edu.

Note: this survey is best displayed on a laptop or desktop computer. Some features may be less compatible for use on a mobile device.

Q2 Unique ID Number (this was provided to you in the email with the link to this survey)

Q3 What is the approximate size of your organization?

Q4 Please select your work industry.

- * Construction
- * Educational Services
- * Financial Activities
- * Health Services
- * Information
- * Leisure & Hospitality
- * Manufacturing
- * Natural Resources & Mining
- * Professional & Business Services
- * Trade (Wholesale & Retail)
- * Transportation
- * Utilities
- * Other

Q5 Briefly describe the nature of your work role and how your role relates to your supervisor's role organizationally.

Q6 How often do you interact with your supervisor on any given week or month?

Q7 How long have you been working in this role under the same supervisor?

Q8 The term "toxic leader" is subjective and includes a wide spectrum of behavior and results. Briefly describe examples of observed behavior or results from your supervisor that you would consider "toxic."

Q9 Consider the way your supervisor relates to you and the types of tasks that this person asks you to do. Read the following statements and assign your agreement to each.

(1=Entirely Disagree, 2=Strongly Disagree, 3=Somewhat Disagree, 4=Neutral, 5=Somewhat Agree, 6=Strongly Agree, 7=Entirely Agree)

1. This person asks me to do tasks that I enjoy doing.
2. This person asks me to do tasks that I am willing to do.
3. This person asks me to do tasks that are reasonable requests, given my job.
4. This person asks me to do things that are above and beyond my normal job requirements.
5. This person asks me to do things I refuse to ever do.

Q10

Organizational members generally do the things their superior wants them to do. Please indicate the extent to which you do or prefer doing the things your superior wants by selecting a number on the scale provided for each statement.

(1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Undecided, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree)

1. I follow my superior's orders.
2. I like to do what my superior suggests.
3. I prefer not to comply with my superior's instructions.
4. I comply with my superior.
5. I do what my superior suggests.
6. I don't like to follow my superior's orders.
7. I prefer not to comply with the directives of my superior
8. I follow the work-procedures set up by my superior.
9. I prefer to follow the work-procedures set up by my superior
10. I comply with the instructions of my superior.

Q11 Below are several statements about you with which you may agree or disagree. Using the response scale below, indicate your agreement or disagreement with each item by placing the appropriate number on the line preceding that item.

(1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree)

1. I am confident I get the success I deserve in life.
2. Sometimes I feel depressed.
3. When I try, I generally succeed
4. Sometimes when I fail I feel worthless
5. I complete tasks successfully.
6. Sometimes, I do not feel in control of my work.
7. Overall, I am satisfied with myself.
8. I am filled with doubts about my competence.
9. I determine what will happen in my life.
10. I do not feel in control of my success in my career.
11. I am capable of coping with most of my problems.
12. There are times when things look pretty bleak and hopeless to me.

Post-Study Survey

Q1

Welcome

This survey should take you around 5-10 minutes to complete. Your responses will be kept completely confidential. If you would like to contact the Principal Investigator in the study, please e-mail Gary Cheng at gary.cheng@pepperdine.edu.

Note: this survey is best displayed on a laptop or desktop computer. Some features may be less compatible for use on a mobile device.

Q2 Unique ID Number (this was provided to you in the email with the link to this survey)

Q3 Consider the way your supervisor relates to you and the types of tasks that this person asks you to do. Read the following statements and assign your agreement to each.

(1=Entirely Disagree, 2=Strongly Disagree, 3=Somewhat Disagree, 4=Neutral, 5=Somewhat Agree, 6=Strongly Agree, 7=Entirely Agree)

1. This person asks me to do tasks that I enjoy doing.
2. This person asks me to do tasks that I am willing to do.
3. This person asks me to do tasks that are reasonable requests, given my job.
4. This person asks me to do things that are above and beyond my normal job requirements.
5. This person asks me to do things I refuse to ever do.

Q4 Organizational members generally do the things their superior wants them to do. Please indicate the extent to which you do or prefer doing the things your superior wants by selecting a number on the scale provided for each statement.

(1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Undecided, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree)

1. I follow my superior's orders.
2. I like to do what my superior suggests.
3. I prefer not to comply with my superior's instructions.
4. I comply with my superior.
5. I do what my superior suggests.
6. I don't like to follow my superior's orders.
7. I prefer not to comply with the directives of my superior
8. I follow the work-procedures set up by my superior.
9. I prefer to follow the work-procedures set up by my superior
10. I comply with the instructions of my superior.

Q5 Below are several statements about you with which you may agree or disagree. Using the response scale below, indicate your agreement or disagreement with each item by placing the appropriate number on the line preceding that item.

(1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree)

- 1. I am confident I get the success I deserve in life.
- 2. Sometimes I feel depressed.
- 3. When I try, I generally succeed
- 4. Sometimes when I fail I feel worthless
- 5. I complete tasks successfully.
- 6. Sometimes, I do not feel in control of my work.
- 7. Overall, I am satisfied with myself.
- 8. I am filled with doubts about my competence.
- 9. I determine what will happen in my life.
- 10. I do not feel in control of my success in my career.
- 11. I am capable of coping with most of my problems.
- 12. There are times when things look pretty bleak and hopeless to me.

Q6 Approximately how many times did you practice mindfulness each week?

(This is just an estimate. Assume one session can range from 30 seconds to 30+ minutes. And yes, please count multiple sessions during the day, if applicable.)

	Approximate # of Sessions per Week
Formal practices	_____
Informal practices	_____
Your own practices	_____
Journaling	_____
Mindfulness articles & videos	_____

Appendix E: CITI Completion Certificate

Appendix E: CITI Completion Certificate

COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI PROGRAM)

COMPLETION REPORT - PART 1 OF 2 COURSEWORK REQUIREMENTS*

* NOTE: Scores on this [Requirements Report](#) reflect quiz completions at the time all requirements for the course were met. See list below for details. See separate Transcript Report for more recent quiz scores, including those on optional (supplemental) course elements.

- **Name:** Gary Cheng (ID: 5846742)
- **Email:** gary.cheng@pepperdine.edu
- **Institution Affiliation:** Pepperdine University (ID: 1729)
- **Institution Unit:** MSOD

- **Curriculum Group:** MSOD Human Subjects Training
- **Course Learner Group:** Same as Curriculum Group
- **Stage:** Stage 1 - Basic Course

- **Report ID:** 20942444
- **Completion Date:** 24-Sep-2016
- **Expiration Date:** 24-Sep-2019
- **Minimum Passing:** 80
- **Reported Score*:** 100

REQUIRED AND ELECTIVE MODULES ONLY	DATE COMPLETED	SCORE
Belmont Report and CITI Course Introduction (ID: 1127)	24-Sep-2016	3/3 (100%)
History and Ethical Principles - SBE (ID: 490)	24-Sep-2016	5/5 (100%)
Defining Research with Human Subjects - SBE (ID: 491)	24-Sep-2016	5/5 (100%)
Informed Consent - SBE (ID: 504)	24-Sep-2016	5/5 (100%)
Privacy and Confidentiality - SBE (ID: 505)	24-Sep-2016	5/5 (100%)
Internet-Based Research - SBE (ID: 510)	24-Sep-2016	5/5 (100%)

For this Report to be valid, the learner identified above must have had a valid affiliation with the CITI Program subscribing institution identified above or have been a paid Independent Learner.

Verify at: <https://www.citiprogram.org/verify/7392d9770-87e5-45b8-afb4-c860bdd86f07>

CITI Program
 Email: support@citiprogram.org
 Phone: 888-529-5929
 Web: <https://www.citiprogram.org>

COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI PROGRAM)
COMPLETION REPORT - PART 2 OF 2
COURSEWORK TRANSCRIPT**

** NOTE: Scores on this Transcript Report reflect the most current quiz completions, including quizzes on optional (supplemental) elements of the course. See list below for details. See separate Requirements Report for the reported scores at the time all requirements for the course were met.

- **Name:** Gary Cheng (ID: 5846742)
- **Email:** gary.cheng@pepperdine.edu
- **Institution Affiliation:** Pepperdine University (ID: 1729)
- **Institution Unit:** MSOD

- **Curriculum Group:** MSOD Human Subjects Training
- **Course Learner Group:** Same as Curriculum Group
- **Stage:** Stage 1 - Basic Course

- **Report ID:** 20942444
- **Report Date:** 24-Sep-2016
- **Current Score**:** 100

REQUIRED, ELECTIVE, AND SUPPLEMENTAL MODULES	MOST RECENT	SCORE
History and Ethical Principles - SBE (ID: 490)	24-Sep-2016	5/5 (100%)
Defining Research with Human Subjects - SBE (ID: 491)	24-Sep-2016	5/5 (100%)
Belmont Report and CITI Course Introduction (ID: 1127)	24-Sep-2016	3/3 (100%)
Informed Consent - SBE (ID: 504)	24-Sep-2016	5/5 (100%)
Privacy and Confidentiality - SBE (ID: 505)	24-Sep-2016	5/5 (100%)
Internet-Based Research - SBE (ID: 510)	24-Sep-2016	5/5 (100%)

For this Report to be valid, the learner identified above must have had a valid affiliation with the CITI Program subscribing institution identified above or have been a paid Independent Learner.

Verify at: <https://www.citioprogram.org/verify/7392d9770-87e5-45b8-afb4-c860bdd86f07>

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program)
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 Phone: 888-529-5929
 Web: <https://www.citioprogram.org>

Appendix F: Informed Consent Form

Appendix F: Informed Consent Form

PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY

Graziadio School of Business and Management

INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

Effects of Mindfulness on Employees working with Toxic Leaders

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Gary Cheng and Sam Rockwell, PhD at Pepperdine University, because you have identified yourself as working under the supervision of a toxic leader. Your participation is voluntary. You should read the information below, and ask questions about anything that you do not understand, before deciding whether to participate. Please take as much time as you need to read the consent form. You may also decide to discuss participation with your family or friends. You will also be given a copy of this form for your records.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to answer, “Can a free online mindfulness-based stress reduction course reduce the negative impact of toxic leadership on the organization?”

STUDY PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in a free online mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) course that lasts for 8 weeks. The course is self-paced and can be done at the times and places most convenient for you. During the 8-week course, you will be asked to keep a regular journal of your experience which you will submit on a weekly basis.

You will also be asked to take two surveys, one before the MBSR course and one at the end. These surveys take 5-10 minutes and ask questions about the tasks assigned by your supervisor and your general feelings at work.

Last, you will be asked to participate in a 30-minute interview to discuss the MBSR course and your experience. The interview will ideally be conducted via video chat but can also be conducted over the phone. Audio and video will be recorded for research purposes. Strict confidentiality will be maintained and your identity will be protected through the use of pseudonyms in analyzing and reporting the data. If you do not wish to be recorded, you may choose not to participate in the study.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

The potential and foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study include : Breach of identity confidentiality, supervisor retaliation, increased hostility or discomfort in your work environment, and loss of social standing and reputation at work. Additional risks include feeling uncomfortable trying out new behaviors in the MBSR course or answering questions about your experiences at work.

Many of these risks can be minimized by maintaining the confidentiality of your participation and the study topic. The Principal Investigator will protect study participants' identities by using pseudonyms when analyzing the data. The interview questions are also open ended, and the degree of sensitive information you share is purely voluntary and at your discretion. Also, the MBSR course is self-paced with all exercises being optional. Last, you may choose to stop participating in the study at any time.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

As this is a research study, no potential benefits for participants. One anticipated benefit to society is helping organizations to reduce the negative effects of toxic leaders by focusing on the staff who work for them. Over the last 50 years, much research has been conducted on toxic leaders, but relatively few studies have been conducted on those who work under their supervision, so these study results will contribute to a relatively new area of research. After all, when toxic leaders move from one organization to the next, it is the employees who need effective strategies.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The records collected for this study will be confidential as far as permitted by law. However, if required to do so by law, it may be necessary to disclose information collected about you. Examples of the types of issues that would require me to break confidentiality are if disclosed any instances of child abuse and elder abuse. Pepperdine University's Human Subjects Protection Program (HSPP) may also access the data collected. The HSPP occasionally reviews and monitors research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research subjects.

The data will be stored in a password-protected folder on a password-protected computer in the principal investigator's place of residence. The data will be stored for a minimum of three years and will be destroyed after 5 years. The data collected will be de-identified using pseudonyms, transcribed, and coded. A third party service will be used for transcribing the recorded audio from interviews, and pseudonyms will be used to maintain confidentiality.

SUSPECTED NEGLECT OR ABUSE OF CHILDREN

Under California law, the researcher(s) who may also be a mandated reporter will not maintain as confidential, information about known or reasonably suspected incidents of abuse or neglect of a child, dependent adult or elder, including, but not limited to, physical, sexual, emotional, and financial abuse or neglect. If any researcher has or is given such information, he or she is required to report this abuse to the proper authorities.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Your participation is voluntary. Your refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study.

ALTERNATIVES TO FULL PARTICIPATION

The alternative to participation in the study is not participating or only completing the portions of the MBSR course for which you feel comfortable.

INVESTIGATOR'S CONTACT INFORMATION

You understand that the investigator is willing to answer any inquiries you may have concerning the research herein described. You understand that you may contact Gary Cheng (gary.cheng@pepperdine.edu) and Sam Rockwell (srockwell@foursquare.org) if you have any other questions or concerns about this research.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT – IRB CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions, concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant or research in general please contact Dr. Judy Ho, Chairperson of the Graduate & Professional Schools Institutional Review Board at Pepperdine University, 6100 Center Drive, Suite 500, Los Angeles, CA 90045, 310-568-5753 or gpsirb@pepperdine.edu.

Appendix G: Impact of Mindfulness in a Toxic Triangle System, Selected Quotes

Appendix G: Impact of Mindfulness in a Toxic Triangle System, Selected Quotes

Theme	Number of Comments	Example Quotes
Family Systems Theory	106	
- Differentiation of Self	40	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - When you're okay with just letting yourself be yourself in that moment, and people can sense that, then I think that they react much more positively to that, in a genuine way. - [We'll work together] for the next x many years so let me do the right thing and actively try to set the right precedent. - Am I communicating properly to this person? If I'm not, I want to know. - I realized that the girl is not an enemy—she's a friend that's trying to help me." - It's okay to be vocal about challenges at work sometimes. - And before in the past I wouldn't have yelled back at her. Just been like, "Oh, it's not worth it. I'm too scared of confrontation. I'm too scared of conflict." But in that moment, I think it was okay because she's very straightforward with me so I'm like I think it's okay to reciprocate that. And I think that if I'm doing it in a way that isn't attacking her or and being respectful of how I think that she will respond to it, using my knowledge of her then I think that she would be able to take it pretty well. And she did. - That person has actually been more straightforward with me, in a way that I appreciate because a lot of times in the past, I felt like she wouldn't tell me what she was thinking. It felt like pulling teeth. I just want to know what your thoughts are and what your opinions are. And I felt like I don't know if they were afraid of letting me know what they thought or what's going on. But I think since then, since we've had a few more interactions where I'm like, "Let's just be honest with one another." I mean I don't say that but we're just practicing it, she's less and less hesitant with telling me what she's actually doing or thinking, which I appreciate. Because then she'll come find me and be like, "Oh, this is what I'm thinking. This what we should we do." And I experienced that this past week as well. Like I don't have to go to her and ask her anymore, she just comes to me and tells me straight up. I really appreciate that because it saves

		became less caustic.
		- You know, some of them, they say, "I need to be less snarky, be like you in this situation. 'Cause I'm starting to walk the line now." It's very obvious and they're starting to approach me, give me calls and stuff.
- Being Non-Reactive	24	- To stop and breathe and say, "OK, what's more important in life? To think about this or just do what I need to do and move on?"
		- I feel like I am able to handle being caught off guard like that much better.
		- I feel very tense because no one is talking in the moment – it's completely silent. I am trying to be okay with the silence and not be afraid of it.
		- It's okay to take time to think before giving a response in a conversation.
- Emotional Field	7	- Those kinds of situations I think bond us because we're able to laugh together and able to be honest with each other and be respectful of each other.
- Staying connected despite disagreement	5	- You care more about the person than the positive relationship... The end goal is to be relational, not achieve a certain result.
<hr/>		
Conducive Environment	35	
- Lower Power Distance	20	- I think it's great that you do speak up so people don't take advantage of you... They know that you have a voice.
		- It helps solidify the fact that it's okay to be vocal about challenges at work.
		- Struggling together. Not necessarily together, but like do what we need to do to get through the end of the day kind of thing. And so it's less of her, not completely, but it's a little bit less of her actively trying to stand in the way of my things.... Mutual regard for one another.
		- Because I've given myself the OK that I'm frustrated, I feel more safe in expressing that frustration, whether or not the party on the other end is okay with it.
- More Shared Responsibility	9	- We're both struggling to make this new situation work to the best of our abilities. And that meant working better as a team.
		- 'Cause when you're not mindful of things, then you point fingers. If you become mindful of events, then I think your mind is freer to ask the question, "Oh, perhaps it was you..." (pointing at himself)
		- It was more like, all right, this is the start of a new

		<p>kind of relationship with this person, I need to set the ground work for a healthy relationship between me and this new boss. So what does that look like? That looks like me communicating more, me initiating more, me taking on responsibility more. Finding out how I can help and then taking that on whether or not I was comfortable doing so or not.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ...for the next “x” many years, so let me do the right thing and actively try to set the right precedent. - I've also brought up work outside of the regular stuff that we need to be doing and be like, "Hey, these things are great investing opportunities. I did this on my own time and I'm very convinced of this," and so on.
- More Individualism	2	- It's just like a habit, but I've told myself to speak clearly and loudly the first time. And I think that helped as coming across also as more professional. Just being okay having a voice, I guess.
- Less Uncertainty Avoidance	2	- In the past, I wouldn't even speak up, I would just wait for a coworker to say something...I didn't want to be the one responding to them because I didn't want to get in trouble for anything that I might say that is inappropriate or whatever, but I found myself more comfortable.
- More Organizational Resources	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Those kind of situations I think bonds us because we're able to laugh together and able to be honest with each other and be respectful of each other. So I was like, I walked away from that experience knowing, "Oh, we can handle each other in that way and that's great." And I hope that we can continue that kind of relationship. She knows that it's safe to be honest with me and I know that it's safe to be honest with her. - So I think the reaction to me being honest with other people and me working on being honest with other people and communicating clearly is that they now feel safe to do that with me as well
Susceptible Follower Characteristics	24	
- Internal Self-Concept Clarity	13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The calmer my heart, the more activity I tend to feel on the mountain. As if, my personal well-being depends on how calm and happy my heart is. - And so it turns out... I actually loved the work. - I think since the study it's also something that I've ... I think it's helped in me being more aware of like, “No, this is definitely something I want to work on.”

- Internal Locus of Control	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I'm genuine to my work. I actually like it. And I don't let the other stuff get in my way. - Realizing... I have a lot of control in how I respond or react in interactions with that person. - It doesn't make the situation any less frustrating, it's just I have control as to whether or not I want to give it so much weight. - I don't let it escalate... I'm able to kind of pull myself back. - I learned that I could control my nervousness through my mind. - It actually seems like I just filter out all the crap that goes on at work, whether it's directed to me or even watching that happen to somebody else and they said that, in particular, the way that I respond to the seniors, the choosing especially of interests, it seems positive, but they all know that I'm thinking something different.
- Less Self-Monitoring	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - But really superficial examples are like this person will literally walk into our office and demand something. And in the past, I wouldn't even speak up, I would just wait for a coworker to say something because I was like, I didn't want to be the one responding to them because I didn't want to get in trouble for anything that I might say that is inappropriate or whatever. But I found myself more comfortable being direct. - I mean I think that the fear is maybe still somewhat there. I don't know if that fear is interchangeable with a feeling of respect too. I'm just feeling like this person's above me or whatever and there's that fear/respect. But I think that right now, it's less so of a fear of like will I get fired if I say something wrong or will this person not like me if I say something that rubs him the wrong way? But now, I think it's more of a desire to be communicative and be clear. If that make sense. So it's less of a fear of how is this person going to receive me and think of me but more go a how can I make sure that I'm being clear on what I'm communicating. - I was reminded that this boss is simply just a temporary phase in my life and that I can easily get past this. My jaws wouldn't be as clenched, and I just brush it aside knowing it isn't my fault and that I didn't do anything wrong.

Miscellaneous	9
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- Link to previous initiatives	4	- On speaking more clearly: “I got the idea from watching a video... I think since the study, it’s helped in me being more aware of... this is definitely something I want to work on.”
- Beyond participant's expectations	3	- I was actually kind of surprised at how much [mindfulness] invaded my own thoughts.
- Highly reactive	1	
- No known impact	1	

Survival Tactic	3	
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- Disengage	2	
- Decrease Performance	1	
