

Background and Briefing

Prior research has proved that employee well-being is affected not only by the physical work environment, but also by the psychosocial work environment (Gilbreath & Benson, 2004). As summarized by Sparks, Faragher, and Cooper (2001), **management/leadership style** is one of the four main psychosocial work environment issues that are of current concern for employee well-being and occupational health in the 21st-century workplace. The focus has been on managers because they can be a major influence on employees' work lives, positively or negatively, since supervisors have a large impact on work demands, control, and social support (e.g. Gilbreath & Benson, 2004; Harris & Kacmar, 2006).

Furthermore, in line with the development of positive psychology (Peterson, 2006; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Snyder & Lopez, 2002), there has been more emphasis on healthy work which implies promotion of both psychological and physical well-being (Seligman, 2008; Turner, Barling, & Zacharatos, 2002). Specifically, a body of knowledge about positive leadership is advocated (Sivanathan, Arnold, Turner, & Barling, 2004; Turner et al., 2002). It is argued that positive leadership, which comprises positive attitudes of passion, skills, and confidence to inspire followers, has the potential to elevate followers in the long term in areas such as trust, commitment, and well-being. Munyaka, Boshoff, Pietersen and Snelgar, (2017) found a strong positive relationship between authentic leadership, psychological capital, psychological climate and team commitment. Authentic leadership has a significant influence on psychological capital and psychological climate. This results in a positive impact on employees' performance. However, the opposite is also true where managers apply dark leadership, which is adversely to positive leadership styles. Toxic leadership is destructive and harmful for employees and organisations.

Assignment Instruction

1. ***Critically discuss the theory of authentic and toxic leadership and its impact on employees in the workplace (6 Pages with at least 15 Scholarly references) (20 Marks)***

Authentic leadership

AL stems from the psychological concept of **authenticity**, which means “one acts in accord with the true self, expressing oneself in ways that are consistent with inner thoughts and feelings” (Harter, 2002, p. 382).

Definition

Cooper, Scandura, and Schriesheim (2005: 475) defines authentic leadership as “those who are deeply aware of how they think and behave and are perceived by others as being aware of their own and others' values/moral perspectives, knowledge, and strengths; aware of the context in which they operate; and who are confident, hopeful, optimistic, resilient, and of high moral character”

AL is “a process that draws from positive psychological capacities and highly developed organizational contexts, which results in both greater self-awareness and self-regulated positive behaviors on the part of leaders and associates, fostering positive self-development” (Luthans & Avolio, 2003, p. 243).

Elements / Features / Characteristics

According to Walumbwa et al. (2008), AL is manifested through four dimensions:

- **self-awareness** (i.e., understanding one's own strengths and weaknesses, and the influences of one's behavior),
- **balanced processing** (i.e., analyzing information objectively and seeking advice from followers before making decisions),
- **relational transparency** (i.e., sharing information openly and expressing true thoughts and feelings), and
- **internalized moral perspective** (i.e., setting high standards for moral and ethical conducts).

Authentic leadership and employee outcomes

Literature provides empirical evidence regarding positive relationships between AL and

- **employee organizational commitment** (Jaramillo, Grisaffe, Chonko, & Roberts, 2009; Liden et al., 2008; Peus, Wesche, Streicher, Braun, & Frey, 2012; Walumbwa et al., 2008),
- **work engagement** (Carter & Baghurst, 2013; De Clercq, Bouckennooghe, Raja, & Matsyborska, 2014; Walumbwa et al., 2010; D.-S. Wang & Hsieh, 2013), and
- **work performance** (Leroy et al., 2012; Liden et al., 2008; Walumbwa et al., 2008; H. Wang et al., 2014).
- **follower's trust in a leader** (Clapp-Smith et al., 2009; Joseph & Winston, 2005; Reinke, 2004; Russell & Stone, 2002).

Toxic leadership

When considering the agency of the toxic leader, Lipman-Blumen identified a series of characteristics that were indicative of 'destructive behaviours'. These included violating the rights of followers; violating the rights of non-followers; playing to basest fears and needs; stifling constructive criticism; misleading followers through lies; subverting justice system and committing crimes; building a totalitarian/dynastic regime; failing to nurture other leaders; setting one group against another; fostering hatred of other groups among followers; identifying scapegoats; making their overthrow a trigger for downfall of the system; promoting incompetence, cronyism, corruption; and critically, feeding illusions to their followers, and thereby fueling dependency (Lipman-Blumen 2005a: 19–20). Such destructive behaviours were according to Lipman-Blumen partly connected to the **dysfunctional personalities of leaders**.

Her model identified the **following personality traits** as being central to determining toxicity:

- a lack of integrity that marks the leader as cynical, corrupt, hypocritical or untrustworthy;
- an insatiable ambition that prompts leaders to put their own desire for power, glory and fortune above their followers' well-being;

- an enormous ego that blinds leaders to the shortcomings of their own character thus limiting their capacity for self-renewal;
- an arrogance that prevents them from acknowledging their mistakes and results in the apportioning of blame upon others;
- an amorality that makes it virtually impossible for them to identify right from wrong;
- a tendency towards recklessness and a disregard for the costs of their actions to others as well as to themselves; and
- a form of cowardice that leads them to shrink from the difficult choices.

Definition

"... leaders who engage in numerous destructive behavior and who exhibit certain dysfunctional personal characteristics. To count as toxic, these behaviors and qualities of character must inflict some reasonably serious and enduring harm on their followers and their organizations. The intent to harm others or to enhance the self at the expense of others distinguishes seriously toxic leaders from the careless or unintentional toxic leaders, who also cause negative effects." (Lipman-Blumen, 2005:18)

"The manager who bullies, threatens, yells. The manager whose mood swings determines the climate of the office on any given workday. Who forces employees to whisper in sympathy in cubicles and hallways. The backbiting, belittling boss from hell." (Flynn, 1999:1)

"...it is not one specific behavior that deems one toxic; it is the cumulative effect of demotivational behavior on unit morale and climate over time that tells the tale.... **Three key elements of the toxic leader syndrome** are:

1. An apparent lack of concern for the wellbeing of subordinates
2. A personality or interpersonal technique that negatively affects organizational climate
3. A conviction by subordinates that the leader is motivated primarily by self-interest." (Reed, 2004:67)

“... maladjusted, malcontent, and often malevolent, even malicious. They succeed by tearing others down....With a deep-seated but well disguised sense of personal inadequacy, a focus on selfish values, and a cleverness at deception, these leaders are very toxic, indeed.” (Whicker, 1996:12)

as “leader’s behavior that asserts absolute authority and control over subordinates and demands unquestionable obedience from subordinates” (Cheng, Chou, Wu, Huang, and Farh, 2004:91),

Dimensions

- Abusive Supervision,
- Authoritarian Leadership,
- Self-Promotion,
- Narcissism, and
- Unpredictability
- Unprofessional Behaviors,

From the various definitions, several common themes can be identified. **First**, toxic leaders exhibit an underlying ***neglect for the well-being*** of their subordinates, and may even be harmful or abusive (Flynn, 1999; Lipman- Blumen, 2005a; Wilson-Starks, 2003).

Many toxic leadership articles include stories of leaders

- who berate, belittle, and bully their subordinates,
- who hold subordinates responsible for things beyond their control or tasks beyond their job descriptions, and
- who cause their subordinates to work harder and sacrifice more than is reasonable (for examples, see: Ambrose, 1992; Frost, 2004; Wilson-Starks, 2003).

A **second theme** is exemplified by ***micromanaging*** to the point where subordinates are cowered and stifled. Lipman-Blumen (2005a) described this as

- “stifling constructive criticism and teaching supporters (sometimes by threats and authoritarianism) to comply with, rather than to question, the leader’s judgment and actions” (p. 20) and
- Wilson-Starks (2003) wrote “in a toxic leadership environment, ‘yes’ people are rewarded and promoted to leadership roles, while people who more fully engage their mental resources, critical thinking, and questioning skills are shut out from decision-making and positions of influence” (p. 2).
- Other anecdotes included leaders who demand obedience and who are commandeering.

A **third common** theme indicates that toxic leaders are *narcissistic*.

- They have a need to be viewed in a positive light by others coupled with
- a desire to enhance their own self-image.
- Toxic leaders were often described as being self-interested,
- lacking empathy or sensitivity for others, and
- having inflated opinions of their own importance.

2. Explain and practically demonstrate your authentic leadership style and how you should be utilising it in the workplace to positively contributing to employee wellness in your organisation (5 Pages, 20 Marks)

According to Walumbwa et al. (2008), AL is **manifested through four dimensions**:

- **self-awareness** (i.e., understanding one’s own strengths and weaknesses, and the influences of one’s behavior),
 - *Know weakness*
 - *Know strengths*
 - *Seek feedback*
 - *Accept the feelings I have of myself*
- **balanced processing** (i.e., analyzing information objectively and seeking advice from followers before making decisions),
 - *actions reflect core values*

- *don't allow group pressure to control me*
- *others know where I stand on controversial issues*
- *my morals guide my leadership actions*
- *relational transparency (i.e., sharing information openly and expressing true thoughts and feelings),*
 - *I openly share my feelings with others*
 - *I let others know who I truly am as a person*
 - *I rarely present a "false" front to others*
 - *I admit my mistakes to others and*
- *internalized moral perspective (i.e., setting high standards for moral and ethical conducts).*
 - *seek others' opinions before making up my own mind.*
 - *I listen closely to the ideas of those who disagree with me*
 - *I do not emphasize my own point of view at the expense of others*
 - *I listen very carefully to the ideas of others before making decisions,*

In the application of your authentic leadership style show insight and elaborate on:

a) Who am I as a person and as an authentic leader? (10 Marks)

According to Walumbwa et al. (2008), AL is manifested through four dimensions:

- *self-awareness (i.e., understanding one's own strengths and weaknesses, and the influences of one's behavior),*
- *balanced processing (i.e., analyzing information objectively and seeking advice from followers before making decisions),*
- *relational transparency (i.e., sharing information openly and expressing true thoughts and feelings), and*
- *internalized moral perspective (i.e., setting high standards for moral and ethical conducts).*

b) Who do I serve in the workplace, and why? (5 Marks)

Table 1:
A Purpose-Driven Model of Leadership

VI	Transcendents	Society	Transcendents go beyond the institution they govern by ensuring that the institution grows while contributing to the entire community.
V	Builders	Institution	Builders make decisions that serve and help to build the institution.
IV	Achievers	Command from Above	Achievers are effective in getting the job done. They serve the goal commanded from above (e.g., a boss, a board, or the law) without broader consideration.
III	Chameleons	Prevailing Winds	Chameleons adapt to their surroundings and serve whichever group they belong to. Chameleons are often used by others.
II	Opportunists	Themselves	Opportunists exhibit no consideration of their friends, family, society, or institution. They serve themselves and think only about their own benefit.
I	Sociopaths	No One	Sociopath is the catchword for destructive persons. Sociopaths serve neither themselves nor their surroundings.*

*Sociopaths are more commonly male.

3. ***Think about a time in your career when you have prospered (flourished, thrived, grown, or succeeded) at work. Explain, using concrete examples, the role that your leader (direct supervisor or manager) played that enabled you to feel this way. Compare this outcome with authentic leadership behavior of your manager as leader.*** **(10 Marks)**
4. ***Think about a time in your career when you were feeling very down (depressed, miserable, unhappy and despondent) at work. Explain, using concrete examples, the role that your leader (direct supervisor or manager) played that enabled you to feel this way. Compare this outcome with toxic leadership behavior of your manager as leader.*** **(10 Marks)**

TOTAL 75 Marks

Your assignment layout/report

You report, including references should adhere to the following structure

- Introduction
- Literature/Theoretical review
- Practical application
- Conclusion
- Reference list

Please submit your report to Leon.Jackson@nwu.ac.za with the heading data for individual assignment MBAD 821) on or before the due date for your campus.