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Masters Research Report

A Qualitative Exploration of Subordinates' Subjective Experiences of Toxic Leadership

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A research project submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MA by coursework and Research Report (Organisational Psychology) in the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

July 2019

Declaration

“I declare that this research project is my own, unaided work. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at this or any other University.”

Signature:

N.Selepe

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Date:

17/07/2019

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Abstract

Toxic Leadership is a critical issue that results in severely negative impacts on wellbeing, not only of the subordinates who are exposed to it, but also for the organisation at large. Individuals exposed to toxic leadership tend to have negative work experiences that have often been characterized as being harmful, humiliating and even unfair. These experiences are potentially destructive to all facets of an individual, be it psychologically, physically, spiritually or socially, and commonly then compromise, an individual's sense of purpose and meaning. The aim of this study is therefore to present a qualitative account of toxic leadership within the workplace. Through conducting an in-depth exploration of subordinates lived experiences of toxic leadership within the work environment, the study undertook to explore and unpack the toxic leadership phenomena and its bearings on subordinates. Eight individuals who worked in the consulting industry in Johannesburg, South Africa, who admitted/acknowledged to have had first-hand experience of toxic leadership or were at the time a subordinate of a toxic leader, were interviewed with regards to their perceptions and subjective experiences of toxic leadership. Data was collected for this study by means of face-to-face semi-structured interviews that were based on a self-developed interview schedule. The results of this study indicated that owing to the toxic leader's behaviour a number of adverse impacts on the individual – such as psychological and physical effects, poor eating and sleeping patterns, dissociative and post-traumatic stress symptoms, a lack of confidence and emotional breakdown among others – and on the organisation – such as an increase in counterproductive work behaviours, a lack of organisational commitment, engagement and motivation – result. The findings of this study are noteworthy as they provide detailed insights into the effects that toxic leaders have, not only on the ability of subordinates to work effectively, but also on their sense of self, their psychological and physical wellbeing. These findings can hopefully make organisations aware of the Toxic Leadership phenomena, and furthermore afford them with the necessary measures for identifying Toxic Leadership and circumventing the presence of this phenomenon within the workplace.

Keywords: *Toxic Leadership; Subordinate; Perceptions; Subjective Experiences; Individual Wellbeing; Organisational Wellbeing.*

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Chapter 1: Literature Review

1.1. Introduction

With changes to the modern-day workplace constantly and rapidly arising owing to the intensification of the demands of both globalisation and relevant technological advances, the role of leadership in the workplace has consequently required dramatic changes in order to respond to these advances and thereby, ensure organisational survival (Todnem, 2005). For decades' leadership has been an area of significant interest, with studies on leadership dating as far as the early 20th century (Ladnis, Hill, & Harvey, 2014). In seeking to fully delve into the core of leadership, many have sought to define what allows true leaders to be distinguished from the masses (Yukl & Van Fleet, 1992). Thus theories involving the traits, behaviour, roles, authority, situational interactions, principles, personality and intellect, among many, have emerged (Yukl & Van Fleet, 1992). Despite the extensity of the research and theories of effective leadership, a few have however addressed, or made efforts to understand the nature and effects of destructive leadership on the organisation and its people (Einarsen, Aasland, & Skogstad, 2007; Schmidt, 2008).

In many leadership studies, leaders are often characterised as individuals who are able to inspire, support, assist, facilitate and motivate their subordinates (Middleton, 2018). They are also depicted as having the capacity to inspire and persuade similar behaviours and approaches in teams (De Jong & Den Hartog, 2007). In organisations, leaders are often present so as to warrant that organisational objectives are met through inspiring subordinates, followers or team members (Vroom & Jago, 2007). These leaders are therefore important as they provide more than just inspiration to their followers, but also operational oversight and additional managerial services (Middleton, 2018). It is consequently for this reason that "good leaders" are deemed assets to an organisation.

Owing to traditional research's emphasis on features related to successful leadership, commonly, an implicit assumption that unsuccessful or ineffectual leadership basically suggests the absence of leadership altogether has been made (Ashforth, 1994; Einarsen et al., 2007). Conversely, research on the negative aspects of leadership has disputed this belief, by providing strong evidence for a type of dysfunctional leadership called 'toxic leadership' (Ashforth, 1994; Einarsen et al., 2007; Schmidt, 2008). This uncommonly explored leadership style is assumed to have predominantly adverse effects for subordinates, and in the long run, the organisation as a whole (Schmidt, 2008). Consequently, so as to mitigate its effects on

individuals and organizations, a growing need to understand this leadership style and to identify such leaders has emerged.

The military may be deemed as an exemplar environment where toxic leadership thrives (Reed, 2004), however, it has been increasingly noted that corporate organisations are not exempt from such leadership (Mathieu, Neumann, Hare, & Babiak, 2014). In particular, the consulting industry may be deemed yet another popular habitation for toxic leaders due to its extreme competitiveness, high demands, strict deadlines, challenging work, demand for top quality outputs, etc. According to The Association of Management Consulting, consulting is basically a service which is offered for a given fee by independent experts who assist in improving the administration, operations, and commercial functioning of a given organisation (the client) (McKenna, 1995). Ever since the emergence of consulting in the early 1930's, the consulting industry has generally been renowned for being challenging (Consultancy United Kingdom, 2019; McKenna, 1995). The consulting industry is often associated with highly influential positions, high levels of diversity, an exponential learning curve, a great deal of personal and career development, travelling (both locally and internationally), high salaries etc. (Consulting United Kingdom, 2019). To a certain degree these are true, as the industry continues to be ranked among the best industries to join as a graduate, also because, several renowned consulting firms are deemed as some of the most esteemed agencies in the world (Consulting United Kingdom, 2019).

Although the consulting industry is perceived by many as being one of the most exciting and rewarding industries to be a part of, there are however disadvantages to working in the industry (Consulting United Kingdom, 2019). These disadvantages are characterized by the competitive work environment, extended working hours, the strain on work-life balance – particularly consultant's social lives, as well as a sense of not belonging to a particular organization, as consultants spend most of their time at their client/s (Poulfelt, Olson, Bhambri, & Griener, 2017; Consulting United Kingdom, 2019). Consultancies are known for being preoccupied with selling more and more business and are also known for being invested in contributing to their client's success, therefore squeezing maximum profit out of employees, while securing long-lasting competitive advantage for clients (Sarvary, 1999; Poufelt et al., 2017). Consultancies are often described as self-serving, ruthless and very manipulative (Poufelt et al., 2007). As a result, a great deal of pressure and responsibility is often placed on the shoulders of the consultant, with all blame for potential failures solely directed at these consultants (Poufelt et al., 2017).

Consulting agencies are compelled to embrace change and to constantly adapt to the ever-changing external environment so as to maintain the needs of their client base (Poufelt et al., 2017). Furthermore, they are governed by a mutual dependency that is founded on trust, and where all interest groups are collectively driven to perform in the best interests of the client (Sarvary, 1999; Poufelt et al., 2017). Thus, due to being predominantly client-oriented, "consulting can be a painful experience, where weaknesses rather than strengths are the salient aspects" (Czarniawska & Mazza, 2003), and thus leaders are pressured to drive teams to meet goals – which are often at the expense of being empathetic to the needs and wellbeing of subordinates.

It is therefore useful and imperative that organisations (especially consulting agencies) are aware and knowledgeable about such leadership practices so as to be able deal with them accordingly prior to being gravely and negatively impacted by them. In spite of the severe negative consequences that toxic leadership has proven to give rise to, and despite the growing interest in toxic leadership in recent years, not enough South African research has highlighted the significance and effects of toxic leadership on individuals and originations as a whole. In addition to this, to the researchers' knowledge, no qualitative studies on toxic leadership have been carried out in South Africa. As such, the present study consequently fits into a wider context of scholastic inquiry as it places stress on an issue that influences a substantial number of individuals and organisations' health and wellbeing. The present study emphasizes the pressing need to deal with and reduce presence and negative effects of toxic leadership in the South African workplace, through providing a thorough understanding of subordinates' subjective experiences of toxic leadership within the workplace.

The main aim of this study was therefore to explore subordinates' subjective experiences of toxic leadership within the South African consulting industry context, as reported by a sample of employees working for consulting agencies, who have been exposed to toxic leadership in the workplace. The current study intended to present a qualitative account of toxic leadership within the workplace through thoroughly exploring and unpacking subordinates lived experiences of toxic leadership within the work environment.

In this chapter, the existing literature on toxic leadership will therefore be presented. This will be accomplished through firstly briefly tracking the history of destructive leadership theory, which will be followed by defining toxic leadership. The behaviours and/or qualities of toxic leaders will then be highlighted, using Schmidt's (2008) framework, in addition to the literature

supporting their inclusion of specific dimensions of toxic leadership. Finally, the consequences of toxic leadership on both individuals (i.e. subordinates) as well as organisations will then be provided.

1.2. From "Good" to "Destructive" Leadership

In his work, Bass (1990) expressed that, "great leaders were important in the development of civilized societies" (Bass, 1990, p.3). The inquiry into leadership overlaps with the dawn of civilisation, with one of the earliest documented leadership accounts illustrating the plight of Moses (Landis et al., 2014). "Time and again, Moses demonstrated leadership traits that are highly prized today. Because we live in the information age, where 'facts' evolve daily and the global marketplace is constantly shifting beneath our feet, the skills Moses used to lead his people through the wilderness are extremely relevant: being flexible, thinking quickly, sustaining the confidence of your people in uncertain times, and creating rules that work for individuals from widely diverse backgrounds" (Baron, 1999, p. xiv-xv). So for centuries since that time, a deep interest has been placed on the development of great leaders (Landis et al., 2014; Saenz, 2015) with some of the most common examples including the Chinese leader Confucius who was acknowledged for setting a good moral example; Plato and Aristotle who emphasised the importance of meaning and virtue in leadership; as well as Hegel's (1930) Philosophy of Mind which declared how leaders need to first follow prior to being able to lead (Landis et al., 2014).

Ever since the industrial revolution, leadership has been deemed as being one of the most crucial factors for organisational success (Landis et al., 2014; McLaurin & Al Amri, 2008; Middleton, 2018). According to Maccoby (1979) the demand for organisations to survive and succeed in an environment of growing competition, technological innovations, varying legislations and employee approaches, compels a greater need and degree of leadership than in earlier times. When organisations are faced with the need to change, so as to remain relevant, it is essential that their leadership is suitably flexible to meet these demands. Consequently, the application of leadership in organisations has slowly changed throughout history, concomitant with the extent to which organisations have evolved over the centuries. (Landis et al., 2014). Accordingly, over the years, leadership theories have progressed from being trait, behaviour and situation centred to having a rather change-focused and flexible, contingency approach (McLaurin & Al Amri, 2008).

With specific regards to leadership in organisations, prior to the early 1980s, leadership theories were developed around supervision as a method of generating performance improvements in

secure work teams (McLaurin & Al Amri, 2008). However, after that time, owing to the rise of foreign competition, among other challenges, operating business became difficult. Consequently, for their survival, organisations were compelled to make considerable changes (McLaurin & Al Amri, 2008). Research has thus consistently demonstrated how motivating behaviour portrayed by good leaders often enhances the performance and psychological welfares of their subordinates (Martins & Coetzee, 2007; Middleton, 2018). Research has also however demonstrated that leaders who instigate job-related pressures tend to have an opposite effect on their subordinates (Middleton, 2018).

In order to attain positive work environments that promote favourable psychological states, it has been suggested in the literature that employees need to be able to confirm that their leader's intentions are sincere (Mayfield, Mayfield, & Kopf, 1998). It has been found that, if an organisation lacks authentic leaders then the environmental support conditions of that organisation then become significantly diminished (Russell & Stone, 2002). When subordinates deem their leaders to be reliable, this then produces positive feelings towards the leader and the organisation (Middleton, 2018). Trust between subordinates and their leaders can facilitate a positive emotional climate within an organisation, which can then foster organisational effectiveness. Furthermore, in having a positive organisational climate and culture, factors like employee wellbeing, innovation and productivity tend to improve. Owing to a leader's formal power, a leader can either be a force for growth or destruction. They have the ability to motivate employees and advocate positivity within an organisation as well as have the ability to have a destructive effect on and damage/destroy the work environment (Middleton, 2018). Thus, research has unearthed the need to probe the "dark side" of leadership, with Toxic Leadership being one of the more unique and menacing kind of destructive leadership (Schmidt, 2008).

According to Einarsen, Aasland and Skogstad (2007) destructive leadership can be defined as the systematic and repeated behaviour by a leader, supervisor or manager that violates the legitimate interest of the organisation by undermining and/or sabotaging the organisation's goals, tasks, resources, and effectiveness and/or the motivation, well-being or job satisfaction of his/her subordinates. This definition stresses recurrence of the destructive behaviour as it is believed that this behaviour is repetitive as opposed to individual acts such as once-off outbreaks of anger or impulsive misconduct (Aasland, Skogstad, Notelaers, Nielsen, & Einarsen, 2010). Furthermore, in certain instances, destructive behaviour is described in terms of being about behaviour that disrupts, or resists the real interest of an organisation (Aasland

et al., 2010). In their conceptual model of destructive leadership behaviour, Einarsen, Aasland and Skogstad (2007) suggest that destructive leadership behaviour can be broken into three categories, namely; tyrannical, derailed and supportive-disloyal leadership behaviour.

Tyrannical leadership behaviour, or else known as 'petty tyranny', can be defined as a leader's inclination to 'lord' their control over their subordinates (Ashforth, 1997; Einarsen et al., 2007; Schmidt, 2008). This leadership behaviour is essentially about exhibiting pro-organisational behaviour that is however in conjunction with anti-subordinate behaviour (Aasland et al., 2010). Tyrannical leaders may act in accordance to the objectives, tasks and plans of the organisation, but they usually get results not because of, but at the detriment of subordinates (Aasland et al., 2010). As a result, what senior management then perceives of these leaders is their clear attention to task completion, whilst subordinates on the other hand may perceive these leaders as being abusive in their leadership or even as being bullies (Aasland et al., 2010). Being tyrannical towards subordinates includes behaviours such as being unpredictable, self-promoting, demeaning, inconsiderate, forceful, deterring subordinates from taking initiative as well as passing unconditional punishment (Ashforth, 1997; Schmidt, 2008).

Derailed leadership on the other hand is about exhibiting behaviour that is anti- subordinate and anti-organisational (Aasland et al., 2010). These leaders, similarly to tyrannical leaders, bully, demean, mislead or manipulate, however, they also engage in behaviours such as being absent frequently, engaging in fraudulent activities such as misuse of organisational resources, such behaviours being deemed of as anti-organisational (Aasland et al., 2010).

Finally, supportive-disloyal leadership entails pro-subordinate behaviour that is in conjunction with anti-organisational behaviour (Aasland et al., 2010). Supportive-disloyal leaders are known for offering support and motivation to their subordinates, whilst on the other hand thieving either financial or material organisational resources (Aasland et al., 2010). They often provide employees with extra benefits, more than they are authorised to, which is often at a loss to the organisation, urge minimal work ethics, delinquency and guide their subordinates to be incompetent or to fulfil objectives other than those of the organisation; all while being supportive and amicable to their subordinates (Aasland et al., 2010).

Research has proposed a few concepts that are debatably encompassed within the scope of destructive leadership (e.g. abusive supervision, petty tyranny, psychopaths, etc.), that are either aimed at the subordinates of the leader, or their organisation; and what has been claimed is that, toxic leadership is one of the more unique destructive leadership concepts as its effects

are aimed at both subordinates and the organisation (Einarsen et al., 2007; Lipman-Blumen, 2005). Destructive leadership broadly describes an abuse of power, where the well-being, fulfilment and motivation of subordinates, in addition to the effectiveness of an organisation in terms of accomplishing tasks and reaching goals are undermined or sabotaged. Destructive leadership behaviours are however argued to not be meant to affect harm, but are however as an outcome to being thoughtless, insensitive, or lacking competence, therefore undermining subordinates (Einarsen et al., 2007).

The objective of this study is consequently to investigate the existing literature on one of the Destructive Leadership concepts known as 'Toxic Leadership', and to contextualise it within South African consulting firms. The significance of investigating this subject matter within a South African context is specifically because there is currently limited research on Toxic Leadership overall, with no existing South African qualitative studies. The framework that will be used to theorise Toxic Leadership is Schmidt's (2008) Toxic Leadership model.

1.3. Defining Toxic Leadership

"Toxic leadership, like leadership in general, is more easily described than defined, but terms like self-aggrandizing, petty, abusive, indifferent to [work] climate, and interpersonally malicious seem to capture the concept. A toxic leader is poison to the unit – an insidious, slow acting poison that complicates diagnosis and the application of an anecdote" (Reed, 2004, p.71). Despite the glaringly obvious issue and increased attention on the topic, this style has barely been systematically studied and most organisations remain oblivious to the threat or simply choose to or do not know how to address it (Goldman, 2006; Macklem, 2005). Reed (2004), points out, the "poison" is slow acting, so organisations do not even know they are "sick" before it is too late.

Firstly, the term itself has (and continues to be) used to describe a broad range of organisational issues and leaders. Though these kinds of individuals have been plaguing organisations since their inception, and the term TL was already being written about by Whicker as early as 1986, the term has only started gaining traction in the last couple of years (Kusy & Holloway, 2009). While, academic literature on TL is limited, especially within the South African context, certain types of destructive leadership styles such as workplace bullying and autocratic leadership have been recognized and addressed by scholarly researchers (Schmidt, 2008).

Toxic leadership can be described as a destructive leadership style in which leaders are preoccupied with immediate task achievement (Reed, 2004). Such leaders are often personable

to, and provide their superiors with outstanding and admirable work, but are, in contrast, indifferent or unmindful to their staff and/or group morale (Reed, 2004). They are commonly perceived by subordinates as conceited, self-centred, uncompromising and spiteful (Reed, 2004; Schmidt, 2008).

Toxic leadership denotes a practice in which a leader, by virtue of their dysfunctional behaviour or personal attributes, perpetrate severe and/or enduring harm on their subordinates, non-subordinates and, in the long term, on organisations (Lipman-Blumen, 2005; Pelletier, 2010). These leaders display destructive behaviours that reduce their subordinate's confidence, drive, and self-worth (Lipman-Blumen, 2005; Pelletier, 2010). Even though a leader may be deemed toxic by one individual, contrastingly, the very same leader may be deemed another's hero or saviour- subject to their past, context and evaluation, weighing profoundly on their judgements on the leader (Lipman-Blumen, 2005).

Overall toxic Leadership can therefore a leadership style that harms subordinates- and, in the long run the organisation too- by means of contaminating the passion, autonomy, originality and innovative expression of individuals in the workplace (Wilson-Starks, 2003). Toxic leaders often spread their poison by being exceedingly controlling, and they (the toxic leaders), classify leadership as having power over or being in control of their subordinates (Wilson-Starks, 2003).

1.4. Behaviours and Qualities of Toxic Leaders

Toxic leadership (TL) has been defined by (Schmidt, 2008) as consisting of five dimensions, namely: Self-Promotion, Abusive Supervision, Unpredictability, Narcissism and Authoritarianism. These five dimensions have, in conjunction, been equated to TL owing to their incorporation into the overall TL definition. Toxic leaders are known to engage in the following behaviours: berate, belittle, and bully their subordinates; force their subordinates to comply with rather than to question their decisions. Toxic leaders are also often narcissistic and self-promoting which may lead to them engaging in behaviours dedicated to enhancing their own image. Additionally, their behaviour is often unpredictable thus subordinates never know if and when the toxic leader will engage in an abusive outburst. Overall, most of their actions are motivated by their self-interest and they have little empathy for their subordinates. In short, TL refers to ongoing and deliberate actions by leaders to undermine the sense of dignity, self-worth and efficacy of their subordinates (Veldsman, 2007). This results in exploitative, destructive and demeaning work experiences. These destructive actions may be physical, psychosocial or even spiritual. They can diminish a person's very meaning and

purpose. Despite these negative side effects of toxic leaders, literature suggests that individuals in the workplace will all probably have to deal with a toxic leader at least one point in their lives. Schmidt (2008) affirms, that after surveying over 6000 people in the US, that three out ten leader's people experience leaders who are toxic. Yet, surprisingly, this form of leadership is almost unknown outside the field academia. There are a few possible reasons:

Despite the fact that TL has recently been noted as a distinct destructive leadership style, it is however essential to bear in mind that this leadership style is the outcome of the combination of a number of destructive behaviours, i.e. abusive supervision, narcissistic leadership and authoritarian leadership (Schmidt, 2008). Each of these behaviours have had a significant amount of research done on them as well as their succeeding consequences (Schmidt, 2008), even though they have not been studied under the umbrella of one leadership style, being toxic leadership. A description of, in addition to the differentiation of each of these behaviours (i.e. Schmidt's (2008) five dimensions of TL) in previous literature will be provided below.

Abusive Supervision

Abusive supervision can broadly be defined as subordinates subjective assessments of the degree to which their leaders engage in a constant demonstration of hostile verbal and non-verbal behaviours, excluding physical contact (Tepper, 2000). These assessments are made based on subordinate's examination of their leaders behaviour, as well as the context wherein the appraisal is formed (Tepper, 2000). According to Tepper (2000), abusive supervision constitutes wilful behaviour, implying that toxic leaders enact abusive behaviour for a reason- however it is not argued that these leaders do so to necessarily inflict harm. Abusive supervisors are said to ill-treat their followers to achieve goals other than inflicting harm, e.g. stressing the fact that mistakes are unacceptable to a subordinate (Tepper, 2000).

Abusive supervision is better associated with TL than the other dimensions, as it consists of non-verbal and deliberate destructive behaviours (Schmidt, 2008). Abusive supervisors are differentiated from other leaders by their harmful actions including; publicly mocking subordinates, throwing temper tantrums, expressing infuriation, selfish actions (e.g. being disrespectful or impolite), being biased, unconditional punishment and intimidation (Pettelier, 2010). It is suggested in the literature that, toxic leaders are predominantly concerned with acquiring and sustaining power through methods of inflicting harm (Pettelier, 2010; Schmidt, 2008; Tepper, 2000).

In his study, Tepper (2000) noted that abusive supervision is related to increased turnover rates, reduced motivation, reduced work-life balance, increased assessments of a lack of organisational justice as well as increased psychosomatic distress. Additionally, Zellers, Tepper and Duffy (2002) added that, subordinates of toxic leaders exercise less organisational citizenship behaviours. Further, Tepper, Hobbler, Duffy and Endsely (2004) found that subordinates of toxic leaders are most likely to be subjected to experiencing reduced job satisfaction. It has also been found that subordinates of abusive supervisors tend to have reduced emotional commitment to their organisation as well as reduced assessments of there being interactional justice (Aryee, Sun, Chen, & Debrah, 2007). Moreover, Pettelier (2010) further established that abusive supervision is a major stress inducer for subordinates.

Authoritarian Leadership

Authoritarian Leadership can be summarised as the behaviour of a leader that is described as; "asserting absolute authority and control over subordinates and demanding unquestionable obedience" (Cheng, Chou, Wu, Huang, & Farh, 2004, pg. 91). Authoritarian leaders tend to exercise their power over their subordinates through introducing structure, giving out instructions, promising incentives for obedience, as well as threatening penalties for defiance or insubordination (Aryee et al., 2007; Kiazad, Restubog, Zagenczyk, Kiewitz, & Tang, 2010). These leaders are commonly perceived as abusive, owing to their inclination to proclaim their personal authority and power over their subordinates, mainly through threats or instilling fear (Kiazad et al., 2010). 'Authoritarian Leadership' is a concept that originated in China, and was popularised through the investigation of paternalistic leadership, consequently this is an underdeveloped concept that has however, proven to be related to TL (Schmidt, 2008). Authoritarian leadership has been found to capture some of the key aspects of TL such as the micromanagement of subordinates while working on given tasks, and leaders adopting a commandeering approach (Schmidt, 2008).

Despite the lack of literature around this construct, especially in terms of toxic leadership, studies have found that, domineering leadership styles, like authoritarian leadership, have harmful consequences on subordinate's intrinsic motivation (van Yperen & Hagedoorn, 2003). Studies on authoritarian leadership have furthermore found that, this leadership style can negatively affect the organisation as a whole, as individuals who work with such leaders are found to be more inclined to quit their jobs, leaving the organisation at a loss of their various skills and expertise (Van Vugt, Jepson, Hart, & De Cremer, 2004; Schmidt, 2008). Other damages to the organisation inflicted by this leadership style include; reduced team cohesion,

job satisfaction, motivation and overall organisational effectiveness (Judge, Picolo, & Ilies, 2004).

Self-promotion

Another destructive behaviour of toxic leaders is that of being self-promoting. Self-promotion refers to the strategies employed by toxic leaders to draw attention to their admirable abilities or previous achievements (Proost, Schreurs, De Witte, & Derous, 2010). Individuals who engage in self-promoting behaviours tend to do so to portray their "ideal self", which highlights their personal aspirations and goals (Middleton, 2018). Although leaders who are understood to be self-promoting have also been found to be more resourceful and innovative when it comes to problem-solving, and more predisposed to risk-taking (Kark & Van Dijk, 2007), this kind of self-promotion can however also be undesirable or destructive (Middleton, 2018). Given that a leader is preoccupied with their own goals and achievements at the expense and disregard of those of others (especially their subordinates), such leaders are therefore inclined to be more responsive to the absence or presence of their benefits, while being less responsive or aware of the needs of others (Kark & Van Dijk, 2007). Consequently, subordinates may have negative perceptions of such leaders and not be inspired by their actions (Middleton, 2018).

According to Schmidt (2008, p. 28), "many of the abusive, authoritarian, and narcissistic behaviours used by toxic leaders are performed with the intention of promoting and maintaining the image of the leaders to senior level supervisors". This suggest that toxic leaders act in such a way that, they put forward their personal interests over and above the interests of their subordinates, teams and units, with the intent to preserve a positive image of themselves to their seniors, individuals at the top levels of the organisations hierarchy (Schmidt, 2008).

Narcissistic Leadership

"The real disease of many executives, CEO's in particular, is narcissism." (De Vries, 2003, p.26). Narcissistic leadership has for some time, been an area of interest in leadership research, despite there being much disparity and dispute around what narcissistic leadership is, and how it ought to be quantified (Schmidt, 2008). Research on this topic has consequently been split between groups of those that perceived it as being a destructive (Judge, LePine, & Rich, 2006) and those that considered it to be a potential positive (Kets de Vries & Miller, 1985). Furthermore, some regarded narcissistic leadership as a separate leadership style (Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006), while others theorised it as coinciding with other well-known and recognised leadership theories like charismatic leadership (Deluga, 1997). Regardless of these debates, it

however appears evident that narcissism is a notable constituent of toxic leadership (Schmidt, 2008).

Narcissism is a personality trait that encompasses conceit, entitlement, self-preoccupation, ego fragility, grandiosity and hostility- and is a quality of a number of powerful leaders (Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006). Narcissistic leaders tend to have grandiose self-perceptions and their leadership style is largely motivated by their desire for power and respect, rather than compassion or genuine concern for their followers (Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006). These leaders however also exhibit the charisma and foresight necessary for effective self-promotion (Ong, Roberts, Arthur, Woodman, & Akehurst, 2016; Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006). Narcissistic leadership consequently denotes a leadership style in which the leader is exceedingly self-interested (Campbell & Campbell, 2009). The narcissistic leaders' priority is themselves and their personal interests – which is often at the expense of their subordinates and organisations (Campbell & Campbell, 2009). Words that are often used to describe these kind of leaders therefore include; "selfish", "self-enhancing" as well as "self-interested" (Schmidt, 2008).

In one of the first articles on toxic leaders it was explained how these leaders tend to have a sense of self-importance in addition to exhibiting narcissistic qualities (Whicker, 1996). In one of her case studies, Lipman-Blumen (2005) added how narcissism turns out to be evident in toxic leaders from a broad range of industries. Additionally, Lubit (2004) demonstrated how narcissistic predispositions in leaders can have harmful effects on subordinates as well as the entire work environment as they divert their subordinates attention from the work necessitated by the organisation and therefore altering the organisations culture and affecting the individual far beyond measure (Lubit, 2004).

Unpredictability

In spite of the effects of the destructive behaviours exhibited by toxic leaders, it is apparent that if employees can forecast what will or might take place, then they are better able to prepare themselves for their leader's ill-treatment (Hoel, Glasø, Hetland, Cooper, & Einarsen, 2010). If they cannot however, predict the future actions of their leaders, they consequently perceive their work environment as being unstable, and thus these subordinates are then compelled to direct their energy towards being ready to take on their leaders' outbursts, instead of focusing it on their work (Middleton, 2018; Schmidt, 2008). Unpredictability can therefore be defined in terms of subordinates not knowing what to expect from their leaders in terms of their behaviour.

In his study in which he investigated the behaviours of toxic leaders, Schmidt (2008) noted how his participants rated unpredictability as one of the worst attributes portrayed by their leaders. He furthermore added that while negative behaviour has negative effects, unpredictable negative behaviour might exacerbate the negative results (Schmidt, 2008). Consequently, from this study, unpredictability was first acknowledged as being a dimension - and an important one – of toxic leadership.

1.5. Consequences of Toxic Leadership

Research has indicated that TL has consequences at a number of levels namely the individual and the organisational level. These consequences are presented below.

Individual Level

Quite broadly, TL has been linked to increased stress among employees (Burke, 2016; Lipman-Blumen, 2006; Veldsman, 2007). While there are many definitions of stress; simply put, a "stressor" is an event or stimulus within the environment, and a "strain" works as an indication of the reaction of a given individual to that "stressor" (Bernstein, 2013; O'Driscoll & Brough, 2003). Workplace stress specifically is defined "as the change in one's physical or mental state in response to workplaces that pose an appraised challenge or threat to that employee" (Colligan & Higgins, 2006, p.90). More specifically, research has found that individuals that are exposed to TL have observed higher stress levels, and suffer extremely poor health outcomes – for example greater instances of substance abuse, impaired psychological wellbeing, depression, anxiety, and reduced self-esteem and impaired physiological wellbeing; also suffering health problems such as psychosomatic complaints, headaches, back pain, stomach disorders, etc. (Ashforth, 1994; Burton & Hoobler, 2006; Lian, Ferris, & Brown, 2012; Tepper, 2007).

It has further been found that the individuals exposed to toxic leadership tend to have negative work experiences that have often been characterized as being harmful, humiliating and even unfair (Schmidt, 2008). Such experiences are potentially destructive to all facets of an individual, be it psychologically, physically, spiritually or socially (Lipman-Blumen, 2006), and commonly then compromise, an individual's sense of purpose and meaning (Pettelier, 2010). Individuals exposed to toxic leadership can suffer from anything between moderately severe effects to more extreme severe outcomes. Typical instances of moderately severe outcomes include work-related outcomes such as; increased work dissatisfaction, intention to leave, role conflict as well as reduced work engagement; and more personal outcomes such as increased life dissatisfaction, loss of sleep and psychological distress (Einarsen, Skogstad &

Glaso, 2013; Schyns, & Schilling, 2013). Whilst, on the other hand, more extreme outcomes are inclusive of psychological illnesses such as post-traumatic stress disorder and suicidal thoughts, as well as severe kinds of physical illness such as heart disease, high blood pressure and strokes (Schyns & Schilling, 2013). Subordinates of toxic leaders have also been found to have reduced organizational commitment and thus, are less likely to engage in organizational citizenship behaviours (Aryee et al., 2007; Rafferty & Restubog, 2011; Steele & Bullis, 2009; Tepper, 2007). In addition, those who work for toxic leaders engage in a much higher degree of avoidance behaviours in particular increased absenteeism. TL has also been found increase workgroup conflict and work-life conflict, having a spill over effect into one's personal life and creating home/family tensions (Carlson et al., 2011; Restubog, Scott, & Zagenczyk, 2011).

Unfortunately, the impact of toxic leaders expands to organisational dynamics. Abusive leadership has been found to be positively correlated with turnover intentions, and negatively correlated with continuance commitment (Pettelier, 2010; Tepper, 2000). Owing to subordinates being exposed to leaders who affect their self-confidence, and therefore diminishing their self-efficacy, this often leads to declines in work performance, affecting organisational functioning (Pettelier, 2010).

Organisational Level

At the level of the organisation, Reed (2004) describes toxic leaders as affecting the organisation through "eroding unit cohesion" and "deflating esprit de corps". Research on TL has found upsurges in workplace deviance by individuals who work with or report to toxic leaders (Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007; Pettelier, 2010). Toxic leadership can therefore, in the long run, have detrimental consequences for an organisation, as subordinates are believed to engage in these counterproductive behaviours so as to reciprocate the perceived injustices inflicted by their leader. In an effort to 'level the playing field', subordinates thus impose damage back onto the organisation (Pettelier, 2010). Such avenging behaviours consist of acts like sabotaging work processes, sharing wrong or misleading information, denying co-workers assistance when asked, etc. (Tripp et al., 2002; Pettelier, 2010). So essentially, TL results in increased abuse towards peers and interpersonal deviance in the workplace (Mawritz, Mayer, Hoobler, Wayne, & Marinova, 2012; Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007; Tepper, Carr, Breaux, Geider, & Hua, 2009). The spreading of retaliatory behaviours within an organisation can adversely impact an organisation's bottom-line, or alternatively, its capacity to draw qualified and principled applicants (Pettelier, 2010; Sutton, 2007). Alternatively, employees that work with toxic leaders are found to be more liable to leave the organisation, taking with them their

unique skills (Metha & Maheshwari, 2013). This form of leadership can furthermore have negative effects on an organisation such as, decreased organizational effectiveness and work satisfaction, poor staff morale and reduced intrinsic motivation in employees (Mehta & Maheshwari, 2013). In addition, organizations with a reputation for TL will in the long term be unable to attract suitable talent (Mehta & Maheshwari, 2013).

Studies have similarly found that employees who are supervised by autocratic leaders are more likely to leave and take their various resources (such as skills and competences) with them (Van Vugt et al., 2004). Cramer (2006) maintains that group and organizational functioning depends, to a large extent, on how happy and motivated individuals are to pursue work goals. Leadership is a key part of this process of influence (Chemers, 2001). Literature points to short term negatives of autocratic leadership such as a decrease in the socio-emotional dimensions of groups (such as group cohesion and the promotion of the group as a viable social entity). However, these short-term negatives have been shown to contribute to long term negatives such as a decrease in work satisfaction, motivation, and effectiveness in organisations (Judge et al., 2004). Although autocratic leaders can be bad – the toxic cocktail of all the traits of TL are so much worse in terms of their consequences as highlighted above.

Thus, perhaps the biggest problem with TL in the workplace is that, it seems that this kind of leadership is simply not dealt with and, as a result, is unwittingly fostered by the very organisations that they destroy (Burke, 2016). By virtue of its extremely difficult nature, organisations often turn a blind eye to it. In addition, toxic leaders in the short term, are successful in terms of attaining organisational goals and thus, the problems of such leaders are often ignored by organisations. However, it is important to note that toxic leaders are a specific combination. A leader will not be deemed "toxic" if they only display autocratic tendencies. They need to also have severe bullying behaviours, self-promoting behaviours, unpredictability *and* narcissistic behaviour contained within their behavioural repertoire.

This problem of TL has further intensified in organisations due to many companies use of narrow definitions of competence, which requires one to only focus on technical and professional competencies (Veldsman, 2016). Thus, toxic leaders may still be perceived as "competent" as they can still "deliver the goods" (Walton, 2007). Employees can be emotionally broken down, while able to produce work of a decent standard. Therefore, toxic individuals are still referred to as "leaders" as they are able to motivate employees, but it is done by inciting fear. In the long term, however, their short-term success is unsustainable

(Veldsman, 2007). This is because they destroy their teams, departments and/or organizations in the process. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that an organization can be considered "toxic" if it is ineffective as well as destructive and causes stress for its employees (Harder, Wagner, & Rash, 2016). However, in the same way that we cannot view a leader as "good" because they produce results, as toxic leaders might be highly competent and effective in their jobs, but they contribute to an unhealthy climate among their peers and employees, with consequences far beyond the morale of a few victims (Burke, 2016). TL has several severe impacts upon employees and organizations.

Research Aims

As mentioned, very little research has been done on TL in the South African context despite it being prevalent in many South African organisations. Thus given the seriousness of the consequence of such leadership as outlined above, the reality of such leadership in South African organisations and the dearth of research on the topic in SA; the aim of the present study was to explore in depth the experience of individuals exposed to toxic leaders and the impact that this has had upon their wellbeing both at work and in their personal lives. Further, the study aimed to explore the impact of TL on the organisation as a whole. This study was guided by the following research questions:

Research Questions

Primary research question:

- What are subordinates' perceptions/subjective experiences of toxic leadership?

Sub research questions:

- What are the perceived qualities of a toxic leader?
- What are the effects of toxic leadership on the individual?
- What are the effects of toxic leadership on the organisation?

The above research questions along with the literature review guided the creation of the interview schedule which will be described in more detail in the following chapter.

Chapter 2: Methods

1.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the method that was utilized to conduct this study will be outlined. This chapter includes a discussion of the research design, a thorough account of the sample and the sampling technique that was used, how the interview schedule was compiled (based on previous literature), the data collection method that was employed and procedure that was followed, how the data was analysed, as well as, the ethical considerations that were applicable to the study.

1.2. Research Design

The current study employed a qualitative research design as it intended on presenting a qualitative account of toxic leadership within the workplace. This design was appropriate as it generally accentuates the perceptions of participants so as to deeply investigate, understand and account for individual experiences in the social domain (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). Consequently, using this design helped provide a comprehensive understanding of subordinates experiences of toxic leadership through allowing for in-depth accounts of the participants' unique perspectives (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). Furthermore, using a qualitative design was appropriate as it allowed the researcher to gather information (i.e. data) from a small sample who offered insight into the subject in question, therefore facilitating the formulation of rich descriptions of subordinates experiences of toxic leadership (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005).

Moreover, this study adopted a descriptive and exploratory design, as the researcher was looking to track comprehensive details of the subordinates' experiences of toxic leadership. This particular design was applicable for this study as it is known to assist in gaining further insight into participants' experiences of a phenomenon, while also helping to determine the themes that are core to the phenomenon (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). The design was furthermore appropriate for this study as the study aimed to investigate and describe the subjective experiences of the subordinates who were currently or had previously been exposed to toxic leadership.

1.3. Sample and Sampling

The sample for this study consisted of employees who were (at the time) or had previously been exposed to toxic leadership in the workplace. It was important to find such individuals because the present study aimed to explore and unpack the subjective experiences of employees who had worked for or were presently working with a 'toxic leader'. Such individuals were purposively sampled in order to evaluate the impact that their experience had, or was currently

having on their wellbeing. Interviewing such individuals allowed for a better understanding of toxic leadership and its effects on the individual (the subordinate).

Purposive sampling technique was used so as to ensure that the sample was made up of fitting participants who would be able to make valuable contributions to the study, by means of their experiences (Laher & Botha, 2012). To obtain the sample, the research supervisor firstly identified individuals that had been exposed to toxic leadership, and these individuals then gave the research supervisor their contact details. The research supervisor consequently contacted the potential participants, explaining the aims of the study to them. For the individuals that had showed an interest in, and consented to participating in the study, interview times were arranged and a Participant Information Sheet (See Appendix A) was provided to them.

The Participant Information Sheet (PIS) explained the research purpose in full, as well as what the data obtained would be used for, along with all issues pertaining to:

1. Voluntary participation (Smith, 2003), with no direct benefits or perceived risks as no identifying information such as the name of the participant, their manager or organisation was to be included in the research report or any subsequent publications,
2. The right to withdraw at any time during interview, with no penalties (that's if they accept the invitation to participate),
3. Informed Consent (Smith, 2003), was obtained by means of the completion of signed consent forms (See Appendices B and C). By signing these forms, participants consented to be interviewed and audio- recorded. They also provided permission for direct quotes from their recordings to be used,
4. Confidentiality (Smith, 2003) with no consequences whatsoever,
5. Anonymity (Smith, 2003) in terms of how the interview data would be reported upon (explanations of how pseudonyms would be used and the data completely sanitised of all identifying characteristics),
6. Protection of the data: how it would be stored and who would have access to the data.
7. The PIS also invited participants to contact the researchers if they had any further questions before deciding on whether to participate or not, or should they require feedback at a later stage. The participants were also informed that if they experienced

any negative effects from participating, that counselling and debriefing would be arranged for them free of charge.

For full details of the aforementioned issues please see the PIS (Appendix A) and the Consent forms (Appendices B and C).The sample was made up of eight participants (seven females and one male). The participants ages ranged from 25 to 36 (mean age = 29). Regarding race, the majority of the sample was White (n = 6), while the rest of the sample was Black (n = 2). All the participants had completed some form of postgraduate studies, with the bulk having completed their Masters (n = 7), and the remaining participant having completed an Honours degree (n = 1). All interviews were conducted in English.

Table 1: Sample Description

Participant	**Ethnicity**	**Sex**	**Age**	**Marital Status**	**Education**	**Position**
P1	White	Female	36	Single	Master's Degree	Senior Consultant
P2	White	Female	32	Married	Honours Degree	Consultant
P3	Black	Male	33	Single	Master's Degree	Senior Consultant
P4	White	Female	25	Single	Master's Degree	Junior Consultant
P5	White	Female	29	Married	Master's Degree	Senior Consultant
P6	White	Female	25	Single	Master's Degree	Junior Consultant
P7	White	Female	26	Married	Master's Degree	Junior Consultant
P8	Black	Female	25	Single	Master's Degree	Junior Consultant

Due to the nature and scope of this study, the sample size of the study was expected to be relatively small. The researcher intended to conduct interviews until saturation, so as to warrant that detailed and comprehensive data was obtained (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006). It was found that after eight interviews the data was becoming saturated with no new insights being offered by participants, and with information being provided seeming to follow a recurring set of themes.

1.4. Data collection and Procedure

For the present study, the data collection method used was a self-developed interview schedule (see Appendix D). The interview schedule included semi-structured questions so as to make provisions for the interviewee to elaborate on their responses, and where necessary, enable the interviewer to probe for greater clarity (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Doody & Noonan, 2013). This method consequently facilitated a flexible means of probing into the topic while enabling the researcher to guide the participants' responses for relevance and structure (Fossey et al., 2002; Doody & Noonan, 2013). The main purpose of the interview schedule was therefore, to ascertain the experience of working with a toxic leader from each participant; hence deviations from a purely structured interview schedule were provisioned for in the study.

Eight interviews that lasted between thirty minutes to one-hour-thirty minutes each were conducted. Interviews were the chosen data collection method as they allowed for the exploration of participants subjective experiences and beliefs, and thus extracting their views and generating in-depth data (Fossey et al., 2002). Moreover, owing to the face-to-face nature of the interviews, the researcher was able not only to monitor the participants' non-verbal communication (body language), but also to establish rapport with each of them (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Recording devices were used to record the interviews, which enabled the accurateness and depth of the collected data, while also allowing the researcher to be completely immersed in the interviews. The interview schedule was constructed based on the existing literature on TL and based on existing quantitative measures, i.e. Schmidt's (2008) five dimensions of toxic leadership being; Self-Promotion, Abusive Supervision, Unpredictability, Narcissism and Authoritarianism. From the literature the researcher gained an understanding of the construct (TL), and thereby got an understanding of what questions would be relevant to ask within the framework of a semi-structured interview. Subject matter experts on the topic of Toxic Leadership were also consulted, so as to assist in the development

of the interview questions. The final interview schedule consisted of twenty questions that probed participants' perceptions and experiences of toxic leadership (see Appendix D).

In this study, the researcher was the primary instrument for the collection of data, consequently, the researcher's reflections and understandings of the data may have been influenced by her personal biases, beliefs and expectations based on knowledge of previous research in the area (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). It was therefore important for the researcher to reflect on her preconceptions, beliefs and engagements with the data, throughout the project (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). The researcher was thus compelled to maintain a self-reflexive journal during the course of the research project.

With regards to the procedure that was followed during data collection, firstly, ethical clearance was obtained from the University of the Witwatersrand Human Research Ethics Committee (see Appendix E). The prospective participants were then contacted electronically by email and/or telephonically by the research supervisor, who explained the aims of the study to them. For those that showed an interest in the study, and consequently consented to participate, they were invited for an interview and were provided with a Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix A). An appropriate time and place for the individual interviews was set in order to fully accommodate participants. All interviewees preferred to be interviewed outside of their workplace. Five of the eight interviews were conducted in the research supervisors' office at the University of the Witwatersrand, as it was agreed upon to be a suitable location for both the researcher and the participant; whilst two of the interviews were conducted at the participants' homes (due to a strict work schedule and the other being on maternity leave- hence not being able to travel); the final interview was conducted at a suitable out of work premises venue as was agreed upon by the interviewer and interviewee. The first three of the interviews were conducted by both the research supervisor and the researcher, as the researcher was inexperienced in conducting interviews, hence through observation and prompts by the research supervisor, the researcher was guided on how to conduct interviews. The researcher also received pre-training on how to conduct interviews from the research supervisor, prior to any of the interviews taking place.

During the interviews, so as to firstly build rapport with the participants, the researcher began by introducing herself and their research topic. This was followed by the distribution of the appendices (that is, the Participant Information Sheet, Consent Form to be Interviewed as well as the Consent Form to be Audio Recorded- See Appendices A to C). The participants were

required to read through the PIS and consent forms and sign, prior to commencing with the interview. At this stage they were told if there was any aspect that they were not happy with or unsure of they could ask questions, and if they still felt unhappy and did not want to proceed with the interview they could withdraw. All were happy to proceed and thus the interview formally commenced once the audio-recording devices were turned on. The participants were put at ease with the interview through the researcher having maintained an open and friendly conduct prior to and throughout the interviews. Once the interview was completed, the participant was thanked for their time and contributions to the study, and were afforded the opportunity to ask post-interview questions. The participants were furthermore informed that, should they require feedback, a summary of the results would be made available to them. Upon completion of all the interviews, the audio-recordings were then transcribed and analysed by the researcher.

1.5. Data Analysis

From the data that was collected, in the form of audio-recordings as well as the researchers notes, the researcher had anticipated to describe the phenomenon of toxic leadership and also explore and unpack the subjective experiences of the participants in relation to their wellbeing. In order to do so, as aforementioned, a thematic content analysis (TCA) was used so as to analyse the data collected from the interviews by means of uncovering the core themes and patterns characterizing experiences of toxic leadership. TCA basically can be defined as the interpretation of the presence of a particular theme (McBurney & White, 2007). These themes are indicative of patterns that are necessary for describing phenomena linked to a particular research question/s (Fossey et al., 2002). To facilitate the analysis of the collected data, through using TCA as by Braun and Clarke (2006), the steps that were therefore implemented are as follows:

Step 1: The researcher had to firstly familiarize herself with the data through transcribing the audio-recordings, reading the transcriptions against the recordings and re-reading them for prudence. This was done simultaneously to jotting down any initial ideas about the researchers understanding and interpretation of the data.

Step 2: Secondly, the researcher then began systematically generating initial codes of features that were particularly interesting and that particularly related to the interests of the study, across the entire data set.

Step 3: Once step two was completed, the researcher then searched for themes through pulling together codes into possible themes, and through arranging all of the data into each prospective theme.

Step 4: Fourthly, the researcher then reviewed the potential themes through checking whether the themes firstly worked in relation to the coded sentences and the entire data set; and secondly, whether they were consistent, distinctive and coherent.

Step 5: Then the researcher provided clear and distinct names and definitions for the themes subsequent to having refined the specifications of each theme as well as the general account of the analysis in its entirety.

Step 6: Finally, the researcher then produced a report through using a collection of vivid and convincing extract examples, after having analysed these extracts and related them back to the initial research question/s and literature.

While conducting the TCA, it is important to note that the researcher may have in some ways, projected their own meanings and views into situations which would serve to possibly confound the data. In this regard, it was crucial that a self-reflexive journal be therefore kept by the researcher, so as to ensure that they did not change the meaning of the themes through inserting personal experiences into the interpretation of the data.

1.6. Ethical Considerations

Owing to the nature of this study, i.e. the involvement of a human sample, it was crucial that certain ethical considerations were carefully taken into account. These ethical considerations are as follows:

Prior to carrying out the collection of data for this study, ethical clearance from the University of the Witwatersrand's Human Research Ethics Committee had to first be obtained- and was obtained (see Appendix E). The other ethical considerations that were applicable to this study were inclusive of concerns such as voluntary participation, the informed consent of participants, their confidentiality, anonymity (protection and welfare of participants), the participant's right to withdraw from the study, as well as the storage of data.

In addition to obtaining ethical clearance, it was primarily important that participants were informed about the objectives of the study prior to their participation in the study.

As discussed, potential participants were informed through the mediums of verbal communication (by researcher) as well as a participant information sheet (see Appendix A).

The PIS disclosed to the participants' information on the purpose of the study, usage and storage of the data, the anticipated duration of the interview, the fact that the interview was going to be audio-recorded, issues of confidentiality, anonymity and withdrawal from the interview, as well as details of a referral organisation and arrangements for referral should upsetting/distressing memories be elicited by the interview.

Additionally, on the basis of informed consent (Smith, 2003), individuals who chose to partake in the study, by way of doing the interview, did so strictly on a voluntary basis (Smith, 2003) with no direct benefits (advantages) or perceived risks (disadvantages) for their participation. Consequently, prior to conducting the interviews, each participant was asked to sign a participant consent form to be interviewed (see Appendix B) as well as a participant consent form to be audio-recorded (see Appendix C).

In addition to obtaining consent, participants were, prior to the interview, informed that they had the right not to answer any question/s that may have made them feel uncomfortable and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any given time with no penalties for doing so. Participants were also asked permission for direct quotes to be used in the analysis and write up of the research report (see Appendix B).

Participants' confidentiality (Smith, 2003) was maintained through having kept all of the information acquired from the interviews completely confidential. In order to accomplish this, all identifying information of each participant had to be thoroughly sanitised (Kaplan, 1996). This process helped protect the identities of all participants. Regarding anonymity (Smith, 2003), although it couldn't be guaranteed, primarily due to the face to face nature of interviews, pseudonyms were used for all interviewees in the transcriptions, the research report and any potential publications and conference proceedings that may follow.

All the information collected from the interviews, i.e. audio-recordings and transcriptions, are stored indefinitely on a password protected computer for protection from any unauthorized persons. Participants were asked for permission to store the data indefinitely as part of informed consent. Only the researcher and the research supervisor have access to the raw data.

As mentioned, owing to the sensitive nature of this subject matter, in the event that the questions asked elicited distressing memories and feelings within participants, should this have happened, the researcher offered to arrange for the referral of the individual in question to the Emthonjeni Centre, where they could receive further counselling at no cost to them. No

incidents of experienced distress occurred, and thus there was no need for any referrals post interviewing of all participants.

Documentation of the collected information is currently being reported back by means of this research report which will soon be made available online and in a hard copy form from the University of the Witwatersrand's main library. In addition, the collected information may be used for publication or conference purposes. As mentioned in all of this, all data has been fully sanitised and pseudonyms have been used so that no single person can be identified in any way. Participants were also informed that feedback, in the form of a summary report, will be provided on request through contacting either the researcher or her supervisor.

1.7. Conclusion

Now that the methods that were employed to carry out this study have been highlighted above, the following chapter will proceed to describe the results that were found from the analyses that were done on the data collected. This will include a thorough discussion of what the themes identified and their relation to existing literature on the topic. In addition to this, the implications of these findings as well as recommendations for future research will also be proposed.

Chapter 3: Results & Discussion

3.1. Introduction

The primary aim of this study was to explore and unpack the toxic leadership phenomena through conducting an in-depth exploration of subordinates' lived experiences of toxic leadership within the work environment. Consequently, through employing a descriptive and exploratory design, the study tracked comprehensive details of the group of participants' experiences of toxic leadership.

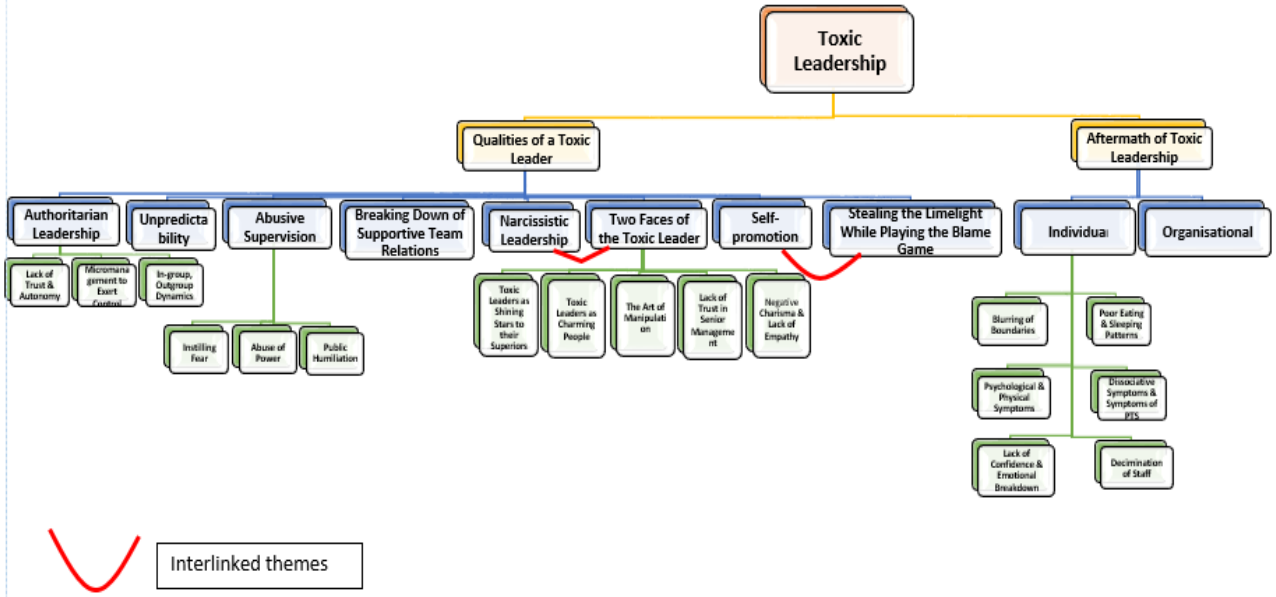
In this chapter, a discussion of the prevalent themes that surfaced from the analysis of the data as well as an account of the theory that was employed to study these themes will be presented. With the intention of capturing the core/substance of the participants' accounts, and to also present support for the ideas (themes) that were exhibited, applicable direct quotes from the participants are provided. The extent to which each theme is aligned to the existing literature is also fully described. Where the themes add to the literature is also explicated. A brief summary of the findings of this research is then be presented, which is followed by highlighting the meaningfulness of this study in light of previous research. Lastly the theoretical as well as the practical implications of the study's findings are presented. In addition, the limitations of the study as well as recommendations for future research are fully explicated.

3.2. Summary of Results & their Meaningfulness in relation to Previous Studies

Upon reviewing the transcripts, evidence for a number of main themes emerged. Five of the themes were closely aligned with those described by Schmidt (2008) namely: abusive supervision, authoritarian leadership, self-promotion, narcissistic leadership as well as unpredictability. In addition a number of other complementary themes and sub-themes were identified within the present research, some of which are interlinked with Schmidt's themes, namely: 'Stealing the Limelight while Playing the Blame Game'; 'The Two Faces of the Toxic Leader;' Breaking Down of Supportive Team Relations and Playing Staff Against Each Other; as well as, A Trail of Decimation & Destruction – The toxic leader as a Plague and the Aftermath on the Individual and the Organisation.

Thus, within many of the main themes a number of subthemes emerged – which have been named accordingly. Main themes and sub-themes often interlinked with others and these linkages, overlaps and their inter connections are displayed in an overall diagram.

Diagram 1: ***Diagram 1:*** **Themes that Emerge from the Data Analysis**



Note that this diagram does not in any way indicate or imply directionality/causality – it is merely a description of thought processes and ideas that emerged from the analysis of the data. (Please find clearer Diagram in the Appendices).

The themes were derived through the researcher having firstly familiarised herself with the data through transcribing the audio-recordings, reading the transcriptions against the recordings and re-reading them numerous times, simultaneous to jotting down any initial ideas. The researcher then carefully coded the data, picking out references that were particularly interesting and relevant across the entire data set. This was followed by carefully pulling together the codes to formulate themes, which were then thoroughly checked for coherence and consistency, and appropriately labelled. The final themes will be discussed below.

Abusive Supervision

According to Tepper (2000, p.178) abusive supervision is defined in terms of subordinates subjective assessments of the degree to which their leader engages in a constant demonstration of "hostile verbal and non-verbal behaviours, excluding physical contact". Abusive supervision constitutes wilful behaviour, implying that toxic leaders enact abusive behaviour for a reason-

however it is not argued that these leaders do so to necessarily inflict harm (Tepper, 2000). With regards to what was expressed by the participants of this study, within the main theme of abusive supervision, a few sub-themes were noted. The reporting of the evidence for the abusive supervision theme shall therefore be rendered by means of presenting each of these sub-themes.

Instilling Fear

According to Hornstein (1996), toxic leaders tend to be predominantly concerned with obtaining and maintaining control by means of intimidating and instilling fear within their subordinates. They are believed to achieve this through engaging in non-physical forms of aggression towards their subordinates such as, publicly mocking subordinates, selfish actions (e.g. being disrespectful or impolite), being biased, passing unconditional punishment as well as intimidation (Pettelier, 2010). In this study, it seemed that the majority of participants perceived their leaders as having portrayed these behaviours as they commonly revealed how their leaders were very aggressive towards them – making them fearful of the leader. Participant 7 expressed how she believed that a toxic leader is someone who *"…uses their position, which is generally leadership or management position, as a power play. They use their position to infiltrate down to their team members and perhaps abuse them a little, in an emotional sense- obviously not in a physical sense. It gets to a point where the individual who is subordinate- their personal life is affected, and the person completely consumes their life, and become fearful about not doing anything right."* Participant 7 further gave an example of how "*there was one guy who booked a meeting room, and instead of (it) being a twelve seater it was a eight seater so there were not enough seats… and she held a disciplinary hearing for this guy for misconduct or incapacity… I don't know what she used, it was so bizarre there was this fear you can't even book a meeting room without this threat of you getting a warning…"* It further seems that abusive supervisors emotionally breakdown their subordinates so as to reinforce the fear that they look to instil and/or foster. For example, Participant 4 shared, *"…uhm, she often said, uhm, that if you cried at work, you will be perceived as weak and you won't get a job…"* This, and other examples across the different themes, portrays the non-verbal signs that participants demonstrated, i.e. the pauses (difficulty in disclosing their experiences), which are representative of the emotional burden experienced by the participants due to being fearful of their leader who is abusive in nature. This leads us to the second sub-theme titled *Abuse of Power*.

Abuse of Power – Aggression as a means to Control

Tepper's (2007) study indicated how Abusive Supervisors engage in nonphysical hostility with common displays of destructive behaviours such as exerting power through being aggressive (angry outbursts). In this study, a number of participants voiced how they felt that their leaders were very aggressive and abusive in their supervision, simply because these leaders wanted to maintain the power that they had over them. Participant 7 expressed how she felt like she was in an abusive relationship in which she was fearful of her partner as *"…it is the same as an abusive relationship, it's that control and that power, and that you feel the way that you do"*. Participant 5 expressed how "*they are aggressive*" and *"…verbally abusive – like bullies. I would describe them as bullies. And uhm, they are all about, like, power dynamics, so all their relationships are political- around power…"* She referenced instances of how her leaders were hostile to their subordinates as they would for example, "*like throw a report at you in your face and say, find the mistake in here you embarrassed me in front of the client…*" and that they would *"…phone him every day and tell him he was useless, he couldn't do his job, he's stupid… and they were like borderline verbally abusive… until… this person left."* From these, and the quotes from the previous sub-theme, it therefore appears that the participants feared their leaders, and felt like victims of abuse. The participants were subject to these feelings due to their leader's constant hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviours towards them, which were employed as a means to exert power or control (Tepper, 2000).

Public Humiliation

Moreover, in her study, Pelletier (2010) noted that toxic leaders often attack their subordinates' self-confidence by disregarding the subordinates work efforts, ridiculing the individual in public and also belittling their contributions. Likewise, certain participants in this study shared a few examples of their leader publicly belittling and/or humiliating them, which was somewhat done in efforts to exert their power. For example, Participant 4 expressed how their leader would always call out individuals on their mistakes in public, *"…if there was a problem and she would call you out in front of everybody else…so not only is she belittling you, but then she's belittling you in front of everybody else… you're not good enough, you have to prove yourself…"*. Other examples of subordinates being publicly humiliated as expressed by the participants of this study include: "*this is wrong, do it again…and she would throw the papers onto their desk"* (Participant 1); *"she used to just speak to people poorly, she would just start*

shouting at people, you're not doing your job properly, this is pathetic, get out of my site… it was an open plan…and, we were sitting in amongst the client…" (Participant 1).

Authoritarian Leadership

Another emergent theme, and the second of Schmidt's (2008) five dimensions is authoritarian leadership. Authoritarian leadership has previously been defined as "behaviour that asserts absolute authority and control over subordinates and demands unquestionable obedience from subordinates." (Cheng, Chou, Wu, Huang, and Farh, 2004, p. 91). Similar to the Abusive Supervision theme however, a few sub-themes were noted. These sub-themes are as follows:

Lack of Trust and Autonomy

Authoritarian Leadership is often characterised by actions such as enforcing structure, giving out commands, promising incentives for obedience, as well as threatening severe penalties for any perceived defiance or insubordination (Aryee et al., 2007; Kiazad, Restubog, Zagenczyk, Kiewitz, & Tang, 2010). These actions are characteristic of being strict in terms of how things are expected to be done, and also, generally not trusting subordinates to make their own decisions. Participant 3 expressed how their leader would demonstrate absolute authority as they stated that, "it's *either that person's way or…there's no other way…its either that person's methodology or there's no other way"*, so subordinates were constantly compelled to comply with the leader's demands. Participant 7, on the other hand, shared how their leader asserted control over them, to the point where everything they did got repeatedly checked, and they also could not complete or finalise a task without the leader's go-ahead. Consequently, according to Participant 7, there was a *"…lack of trust, lack of autonomy… you can't do anything without it going to that person…"* Furthermore, Participant 1 expressed *"…she would make decisions for other people which she thought were reasonable, but if you understand that person's life, it is not reasonable…it's not, in any way going to fit them. And, and she couldn't understand…she would sell out our staff to make the client happy…"*

Micromanagement to Exert Control

The second sub-theme under authoritarian leadership that emerged from the data is *Micromanagement to Exert Control*. According to Kiazad et al. (2010), authoritarian leaders are commonly perceived as abusive, due to their tendency to declare their authority and power over their subordinates, mainly by means of excessive control and fear. Participants commonly recounted how overly controlling they thought their leaders were- to the point where they were fearful of refusing to take orders that were not even work related. Participant 5 expressed how

their leader wanted to know their every action during office hours, to the point where she would frequently check up on them, for example, *"she would just phone me and be like… Why did person X leave the office for three hours?"* and also that *"she would like phone and get hysterical over like a sixteen-rand car claim… why did you let this person drive to this client?*". Participant 5 further expressed how her leader would want to check and recheck any piece of work that was done by the team, prior to approving it as, *"you couldn't do anything without it going to that person and they must read it 600 times, then only they say yes*." Participant 2 on the other hand shared how her leader would indirectly threaten dismissal if they (the subordinates), disobeyed her orders, and gave an example of what her leader had told one of her breastfeeding colleagues, "*you know what, you'll just have to choose it's work or it's your child, like you can't walk out of a meeting to go and express milk*". Finally, Participant 3 shared that the Toxic Leader *"makes everything personal…about them…if you don't cc them in an email, or if you don't…if they just don't know everything that's going on, then you're in trouble.*

In-group and Out-group Dynamics

Finally, the sub-theme of in- and out-group dynamics emerged. A few noteworthy instances of in-group, out-group dynamics were indirectly made reference to by the participants of this study. Participants expressed how the toxic leader would always have favourites, of which were held in high regards in addition to being treated well. Participant 3 expressed that, *"funny enough, that person had their own favourites as well, the people that they recruited to the organization…when the person came in they were untouchable…always praised…regardless of how much work they did"* and that, *"…the person is a control freak, and if you get on her wrong way, then you're not getting recognized…so she recognizes the people who have coffees with her, the people who come to her and tell her, maybe office gossip"*. Participant 4 similarly shared that*, "she would also openly talk about people behind their backs, so she would be sitting over there with one of her people, while a colleague of mine will be sitting over there…and she would go to them and say, you know, that Person X does not know what she's doing and you need to help Person X…but Person X is sitting right there…"* These quotes align with the literature as the literature notes that people who are predisposed to be supporters of such leaders are therefore either conformers – people who submissively let bad leaders assume positions of power – or colluders – people who support these leaders due to wanting to promote themselves in the organisation, and thus seek to impress the leader (Toor & Ogunlana, 2009). Further, in keeping with the literature, they illustrate how an "in-group love" may serve as a supportive drive to help the in-group while exercising "out-group hate" through being

aggressive or hurtful to the out-group (Halevy, Weisel, & Bornstein, 2012). In some studies, such acts are referred to as bullying, where hostile and aggressive behaviours are systematically targeted at an individual or group of colleagues or subordinates (Einersen, 1999). This form of stigmatisation and/or victimisation often causes distress and humiliation which may later affect the performance of the recipient (Einersen, 1999). Thus it could be argued that toxic leaders demonstrate many of the behaviours defined by researchers on workplace bullying.

Narcissistic Leadership

A toxic leader's top priority is themselves, which is often at the expense of their subordinates (Campbell & Campbell, 2009). Narcissistic leaders often portray characteristics such as grandiosity, being arrogant, hostile towards subordinates, domineering and being entitled (Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006). In this study, majority of the participants made reference to how their leader (the toxic leader) was self-interested and how they portrayed a sense of self-importance. In describing the qualities of their toxic leader the participants cited qualities such as *"arrogance, selfishness, yeah, sort of narcissistic types of characteristics"* (Participant 7), *"very condescending"* (Participant 2), *"very dismissive and condescending and in front of the client"* (Participant 2), *"definitely narcissistic, she wanted to get herself to the top at the end of the day"* (Participant 2*), "…arrogant? Like narcissistic. And underlying all of it is insecurity, because I always think that someone can only ever be that horrible to lash out at other people in such aggressive ways…deep inside they are insecure, and then you break other people down to make themselves feel better."* (Participant 5). These finding are aligned with the literature as it has been argued that toxic leaders, like bullies, are very preoccupied with their success, egotistical, have a sense of entitlement and are patronising, exploitative and un-empathetic (Judge et al., 2006).

In his study, Lipman-Blumen (2005) uncovered how narcissistic leaders tend to portray an arrogance that often prevents them from recognising their errors and eventually leads to them patronizing others. He further suggested that these leaders tend to have "enormous egos" that blind them to the limitations of their personality (Lipman-Blumen, 2005). Lipman-Blumen's (2005) findings were replicated in this study as Participant 8 expressed how, owing to their leader's arrogance, their leader constantly felt the need to detach themselves from the rest of the team, reasserting how different and brilliant they were as compared to the rest of the team, as they were *"…trying to use their status…trying to display that they are the leader, instead of considering themselves as being a part of the team".* Additionally, Participant 1 shared how their leader would always say, "*when you're at my level, you can afford to make mistakes, but*

when you're doing the job that you're doing, I expect you to see, I expect to see no mistakes", portraying an arrogance with regards to position and work experience. Participant 5 expressed that, due to being largely self-interested, narcissistic leaders unintentionally create toxic environments, particularly for their subordinates. She stated how a toxic leader is *"…someone who is literally like poison for an environment or an employee. Someone who is more focused on themselves and creates like problems for everyone within the business, especially people who report directly into the leader…"* (Participant 5).

Previous research has revealed that narcissistic predispositions were originally supposed as being as a product of an extraverted temperament, which then changed to, individuals having apparently above average social skills, and hence making them more amiable (Ong et al., 2016). Consequently, narcissistic leaders are commonly seen, by their seniors, as being remarkable and as having the capacity to perform through difficult situations (Roberts, Woodman, Hardy, Davis, & Wallace, 2013). In spite of this, in the long run, these very traits of extraversion have been found to be alternatively perceived as arrogance (Ong et al., 2016), that is often experienced by subordinates, as they frequently interact with the narcissistic leaders, and for prolonged periods of time. This information corresponds with what was mentioned by the participants of this study, as they felt that the people in the organisation who had regularly come across these leaders, generally either disliked or feared them, due to perceiving them to be brazen and quite conceited. Participant 1 stated that *"…some people will say…I haven't worked with her, but she's completely condescending and rude…so, she also does have a very…uhm sort of brash manner…"* On the other hand, Participant 2 expressed how *"people who would get her to the top, she would please them and be the sweetest person, and everyone below her she was like I said, condescending, dismissive, rude."* These particular references partly portray and are therefore linked to the next theme – *The two faces of the toxic leader* – which basically exhibits how a toxic leader can be a charismatic expert to their seniors and clients, while being punitive, humiliating bosses to their subordinates. More of such evidence will be presented next.

The Two Faces of the Toxic Leader

As briefly stated in the previous chapter, the toxic leader can come across as having two faces as they can be charming towards their superiors yet abusive towards their subordinates. Much of the abusive nature of the toxic leader has been described in most of the other themes, in this theme however, an emphasis is placed on the charming side of the toxic leader as accounted for by the participants.

Toxic Leaders as Shining Stars to their Superiors

In this study, majority of the participants expressed how senior management turned a blind eye to the harshness of the toxic leader just because the toxic leader produced results- directly benefitting the organisation and indirectly benefitting senior management in terms of incentives (e.g. bonuses). Participant 3 explained how individuals, like their toxic leader, would be favoured by the leadership of the organisation due to their ability to generate profit, "*in corporate if you're bringing in money, like we work in consulting, so no one, everyone is blinded to everything else, especially the leadership. So it then gets to a certain point, uhh this person was uhhh a good talker and, and, and, uhm what then happened was…uhm…. the politically correct word is…there are some, I want to run away from the word 'favouritism', but there's some let's say, high flyers inside…"*, and they shared their frustrations with trying to report the toxic leader by disclosing, "*it's because we'd have the same meeting with the CEO and that person will be praised…and everyone is looking at her like? You get what I mean? So like it's sort of difficult for you to then, it has to be like a… it has to have a strong point to, the case has to build, with those kind of leaders where uhm…you just don't uhm say, go and say to HR, this person has derailed me and I'm emotionally not well because of this person…because they'll come and say, well…uhm this persons doing well, the leader is doing well…"* and that, "*this person is more experienced than me in politics and looking nice at the leaders…how then do I, I bring up the side that this person is affecting the bottom line and everyone, the critical employees…it's a nightmare for me"*. Participant 4 similarly shared her frustrations with how senior management seemed to favour the toxic leader due to them producing results, as a senior manager approached her and asked, "*why are you so unhappy?*" and so, "*I told him everything, he said he didn't realize that it was so bad and he believes that she…she is really good at her job and is a manager because she is so good at her job…"*, she further shared, *"so she did it because her and senior leader x were so close…and again, she's bringing in so much money…that's why senior leader x loved her…he's, he's…remember he's being judged, and his performance review and his bonus all relative to how much money gets brought into the practice…"*. Participant 5 also expressed how she would try explaining the general sentiments of the subordinates to the organisations senior leaders and how they would refuse to accept it as, *"I would correlate the data and go to the CEO and HR director but the problem is that they would say that I was talking shit, that I was exaggerating, this is not what it meant..."*. Participant 2 explained how shocked a senior leader was when she shared with him how the toxic leader was treating juniors, simply because she was a top performer, and he

therefore did not expect that kind of behaviour from her, *"He was very surprised, because she was a top performer she got results…"* Participant 1, on the other hand, explained how because the toxic leader produced results, they would not be dismissed or even severely disciplined for their actions. She expressed, *"yeah no well…there's, I can tell you right now, there's no way she's going anywhere…they are not gonna chastise her anytime soon, because the revenue she can drive is ultra-high…"* (Participant 1). Overall, it can be argued that all the participants shared the same sentiments, which all boil down to Participant 3's statement that, *"…it's still up to now that we're seeing the leader's effects. It is still difficult for people to trust the senior leadership… senior, senior leadership…it's still difficult because of that whole experience of senior management seeming to favour the toxic leader…"* The above quotes demonstrate how toxic leaders aim to come across as shining stars to their seniors by all costs, and are therefore favoured by senior management.

Toxic Leaders as Charming People

It can further be argued that the toxic leader is charming, but only towards senior management and their clients – not their subordinates. Participants expressed how, despite the negative treatment they got from their leaders and how hostile the leaders were towards them, these leaders were however the complete opposite, i.e. charming and impressive, to senior management and clients. *"she was very charming, so her laugh for example was very contagious and she was extremely funny and she was also very beautiful and uhm confident…extremely confident…but she could be one of those women who were very strong but at the same time when she didn't get her way she could get sort of aggressive…"* (Participant 6), *"but when she got to the client she could basically, I mean, excuse my language, but she could basically bullshit her way through anything…uhm so and I don't have that skill so at the end of the day she was always charming and would win people over…*" (Participant 6); *"a good talker…"* (Participant 3); *"she's, she's in that sense, very much a people pleaser."* (Participant 1*), "The client actually did enjoy her…yes, the client loved her and she loved that they loved her. She, she, almost craved that…yeah."* (Participant 1). Like Corporate Psychopaths, toxic leaders are able to maintain a charming front in order to win management and clients over, through a highly manipulative approach (Boddy, 2005). Corporate Psychopaths are self-serving, conceited, opportunistic people, who can be very charming, determined and manipulative, much like the toxic leader (Boddy, 2005). This ability to use charm as a means to manipulate feeds into the following subtheme being *the art of manipulation*.

The Art of Manipulation – Throwing Staff to the Wolves

Participants expressed how in order to maintain a good image to their clients or to senior management, the toxic leader would manipulate situations, "so toxic leaders that perceive, an art of manipulating" (Participant 3); *"she's very good she's...in her work she's really, really good...and I think she knows how to wiggle her way out of things as well..."* (Participant 8); *"she would never say anything bad in front of him (the boss) …but when he wasn't there…she was a nightmare"* (Participant 4); *"that's why then they develop a, that thing of being liked at the top, because the person made sure that they block the senior leadership from accessing lower people…"* (Participant 3). Some participants also shared how, in bidding to impress their clients the toxic leader would in a sense, throw them (the subordinates) under the bus - which often resulted in them feeling vulnerable. *", uhm one of the days I got to the client, uhm after working all night…and she was late…and at the end of the day when the client wanted to change the format of the next workshop for the next day, which meant that all the work that I had done, I had to redo…and so I voiced my concern and I said there's no more time left sort of thing…uhm but I did it in a professional way…and then she, my leader said, well no, you have to do what the client wants…in front of the client…so I not only felt disrespected…and I just felt unprotected, like there was, I must just basically work all night all over again…by myself"* (Participant 6); *"so I never had anyone there to protect me…uhh so kind of like throwing you into the wolves…yeah…but you just have to deal with it sorry…"* (Participant 6); "*…you know our clients do come first. And I said, yes, but they can't come first at the expense of our staff…because there were also incidents where, it's very unfortunate…our staff were thrown under the bus…because of mistakes she made…so she would commit to something, it's not in our mandate…"* (Participant 1).

Lack of Trust in Senior Management

Owing to the favouring of the toxic leader by senior management, through not imposing applicable discipline onto the leader, a few participants expressed how they lost trust in their organisation's leadership. Participants 3, 4 and 8 respectively, alluded to the lack of punishment of toxic leaders, *"…because that person brought in revenue… they were not willing to completely let that person go…"*; *"I think they could have addressed her behaviour with her while it was happening…so senior management was sweeping everything under the rug… and it just piled up and got worse and worse and worse…until we had a blowout…if they had addressed it when we made it an issue…when we, when we… reported it…then I think it would*

have been a whole lot better…" and *"to deal with people like this...but I don't think it happens, I don't think it would happen. It's just up to the person...sadly... she is really, really good at her job… so she would have won... they wouldn't have done anything more than speak to us...so sadly that's how it is…"* While Participants 6 and 7 respectively shared how they lost trust in management due to them turning a blind eye to their issues, *"I feel like the leadership failed me…"*; *"well…I mean, I have no trust in them…and especially at the time because…I know that previously these sort of things happened and... I mean why is it even allowed to still be happening…I don't know…so…I feel like…nothing, no action would have been taken against that person… because there is a bureaucratic sort of setup"*. Due to senior management's reluctance to take action against the toxic leaders, this often left participants feeling hopeless and helpless. Literature on perceived organisational support supposes that employees tend to develop widespread beliefs about the degree to which the organisation cares about the health and well-being of employees based on the organisations willingness to meet their socio-emotional needs and effectively deal with challenging situations or circumstances faced by employees (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Granted that the organisation fails to do so, employees therefore tend to disfavour and mistrust the organisation as they perceive the organisation as being 'inhumane' due to not caring to address issues that obstruct the wellbeing of the individual (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002), which is aligned with what was expressed by the participants of this study.

Negative Charisma and Lack of Empathy – The Dark Side of the Toxic Leader

The term 'charisma' is often used to depict a subgroup of leaders who by the power of their character, are able to bring about positive effects on their followers (Conger & Kanungo, 1987), however, according to the toxic triangle, the qualities of a destructive leader consist of, negative charisma, personalised power and narcissism, among others (Toor & Ogunlana, 2009). Negative charisma, or else known as the dark side of charisma, can be described in terms of a leader drawing the hatred of others (being the subordinates in this instance) through failing to connect with people on an emotional level, and hence engaging in self-sabotaging behaviours (Toor & Ogunlana, 2009). *"Being emotionally intelligent involves being actively able to identify, understand, process and influence one's own emotions and those of others to guide feelings, thinking and action"* (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2002). Emotions are infectious, and one person can sway the emotional tone of a team, and its effectiveness by modelling (Cherniss, 2001). Effective leaders therefore resonate with their subordinates on an emotional level, while on the other hand, destructive leaders have weaknesses that undermine their organisations

capacity to be successful (Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee, 2002). Majority of the participants in this study made reference to their leaders being emotionally unavailable, or else, lacking empathy, in the way that they managed them. This, according to the participants, intensified their feelings of discomfort with their leaders, as they felt that they couldn't approach and/or reason with them, and thus this made their work experiences more unpleasant. Participants mentioned things like, *"lack of, uhhhh, can I say…empathy especially"* (Participant 3); *"so if you're a toxic leader, you are putting in, let's say, either physical barriers, emotional barriers to towards the people stepping up with you… so my understanding of a toxic leadership is uhm…my people are not inspired let's say to come to work, I'm an impediment towards their career growth, or towards their aspirations"* (Participant 3); *"like she doesn't have the tools…like the EQ to be in the position that she's in…and, so she doesn't handle things well…she doesn't handle stress well…she doesn't handle people queries well…she, she only knows to say yes, even when she should be saying no. She doesn't have a great mannerism with people, she doesn't…her, also like her interpretation of things…is not always accurate…"* (Participant 1); *"…and she told me I am being dramatic tonsillitis is not that bad, she has had listeriosis in January and she went to work"* (Participant 7); *"uhm…one of my girls needed to go see a doctor…she wasn't in a good space, she actually needed to go and see a psychologist…and she set up the appointment, and I think she needed like six weeks and then she'd be able to get an appointment. So she waited for this appointment. Uhm she wasn't feeling well, her marriage was a little bit, not going so great…and it was because of all the long hours we were putting into this project, okay…so she had this psychologist appointment, and she took the last slot of the day, specifically for that reason…uhm her client had said, yes its fine, you can go…this particularly person (the toxic leader), said to her, No, you cannot go*, on the day that she was going, *if there's any issues, or medical issues that you need to get sorted, you can talk to me*" (Participant 1). Thus, the participants were less effective in their work as they felt discouraged and dissatisfied with the way that their leaders treated them and they were denied the opportunity to seek help from specialists when they were physically or emotionally ill.

Many participants further expressed how emotionless and demeaning their leaders were to them, completely disregarding the repercussions of their words and actions to the feelings of the subordinates. Participant 5 expressed, *"they were just cruel...like just really cruel..."*, and gave an example of this cruel behaviour by saying, *"she would walk in and be like uhh that's not a nice outfit, why are you dressed like that? to someone... go to Louis Vuitton and exchange my bag. She treated everyone like skivvies and then they underpaid people and would then send*

the same person who's getting paid eight thousand rand a month to Louis Vuitton to exchange her R30000 handbag". Participant 4 shared that from her encounters with her leader, she understood a toxic leader to be, *"…someone who brings out the worst in people and…there's ripple effects…so, not understanding who the people really are and then…really being ugly and nasty to them…not appreciating them for individual traits…and then uhm making work just a horrible place"*. These findings are in line with those of a South African study which looked at how the emotional intelligence of a leader affected the way in which teams that work on projects in construction functioned (Bikitsha, Mamafha, & Ngomane, 2014). It has been argued that emotional intelligence is the capacity for a leader to understand how their followers react emotionally, consequently, if the leader lacks emotional intelligence, then these leaders are prone to demotivate and offend their followers (Bikitsha et al., 2014). Furthermore, what was found in this study is that, the project managers that had an understanding of how the different people in their team functioned, and also those that communicated appropriately had less disputes in their teams, and their team members felt valued (Bikitsha et al., 2014).

Self-promotion

Self-promotion, is one of the two under-researched dimensions of Toxic Leadership, which can easily be confused with narcissism. Narcissism and self-promotion are similar in that they both entail a degree of self-enhancement. While Narcissism is centred on self-oriented acts which are intended to principally *"enhance the self to itself"* (Schmidt, 2008), self-promotion however focuses on *"enhancing the impression of the self to others"* (Schmidt, 2008). Consequently, self-enhancing leaders are inclined to portray their "ideal self" to their seniors or clients so as to draw attention to their abilities and achievements (Middleton, 2018; Proost, Schreurs, De Witte, & Derous, 2010). In this study, very limited evidence was found for self-promoting behaviours by leaders as only two Participants made reference to this type of leader behaviour. More reference was made however, to the Toxic Leaders inclination to steal the limelight through taking all the credit for work well done – which is directly linked to self-promoting behaviours. With specific regards to self-promotion, Participant 2 shared, *"people who would get her to the top, she would please them and be the sweetest person, and everyone below her she was like I said, condescending, dismissive, rude"*. This particularly corresponds with the literature on how the toxic leader puts forward their personal interests and also preserves a positive image of themselves to their seniors, all in the name of personal gain (Schmidt, 2008). Furthermore, Kark and Van Dijk (2007) added that, self-promoting leaders tend to be preoccupied with their own goals and achievements, which is often at the expense

of and disregard of their subordinates, which the participants of this study similarly expressed. Participant 4 stated, *"…they put their needs ahead of everybody else…to the detriment of…relationships, physical health…all of that…"*, and further added on by saying, *"she got things done…at the expense of people not liking her…so she didn't care if she called you out to make you feel stupid, because then you did something wrong and the client wasn't happy…"*.

This particular theme illustrates how, despite there being Schmidt's five main theme areas, sometimes there are crossovers between main themes on the basis of these themes interlinking. The self-promotion theme directly interlinks with the *stealing the limelight while playing the blame game* theme as they both demonstrate how the toxic leader is quick to take credit, even for work that was not necessarily produced by them – all in the name of making themselves look good.

Stealing the limelight while playing the blame game

As follows from the self-promotion theme, is the *stealing the limelight while playing the blame game* theme. This is another theme that has uncommonly been explored by previous studies, and is based on the toxic leader's tendency to steal the limelight. From the evidence provided by the participants of this study, it appears that toxic leaders are notorious for taking credit for subordinates good work, while quickly shifting the blame for any mistakes or work that is substandard. Participants repeatedly indicated how their leader would take credit for their work, given that the work was of good quality, and that the clients were happy with it, however, when the work delivered to the client was not up to standard, the leader would quickly express to the client that their subordinate/s were the one/s to be blamed. For example, Participant 1 shared how "*if something goes wrong…You guys! What have you done*? *I don't believe I have to work with idiots like you! I gave you this instruction*…not an apology to the client, no…*wasn't my fault*, and *what did you guys do?*". Similarly, Participant 2 stated how "…*if things do go her way, then it's all her…so it is that mentality, and if things don't go her way it is the blame game, How can you have done this? You didn't do the right work! …pointing fingers at the team, and even telling the client, sorry I will manage my team…Where else, if things really go well and the work looks great, look at what I've done*". Further, Participant 6 also shared how *"if there was an issue with some, one of the worksheets or one of the validation sheets, she would uhm look at me as if like…you know? in front of the client…like, Did you? Why did you do that? or Explain… in front of the client, and I would be, I would feel like I was completely thrown under the bus"* and that *"she didn't give me credit for my work, but when things were bad it was my fault…"*. Participant 4 revealed that *"there was an instance that she didn't check*

her work, and she was caught out on it, but instead of accepting it, she put me, she blamed me in a meeting…so she said, well actually, this isn't my fault, it was because P4 didn't check my work…" and, Participant 8 disclosed how her leader would yell at her in front of the client for minor errors that often weren't necessarily her fault, like *"as soon as the client person came… she started speaking to me in a way that I wasn't very comfortable in front of the client, uhm, just exclaiming - this is not good quality work*". The above references are particularly demonstrative of how manipulative toxic leaders can be, and they further support Keashly, Trott, and MacLean's (1994) assertions that, some of the most widespread indicators of destructive leader behaviour include "taking credit for subordinate's successes, and scapegoating subordinates".

Unpredictability

Unpredictability, like self-promotion, is a dimension that was coined by Schmidt (2008). In this study, evidence for this dimension was minimal, as only two of the eight participants alluded to their leader's behaviour as being unpredictable. According to Schmidt (2008), however, despite the fact that negative leader behaviour has negative effects on their subordinates, unpredictable negative behaviour is inclined to magnify these negative outcomes. Furthermore, unpredictability can be described in terms of subordinates not being able to predict the future actions of their leaders, consequently having them perceive their work environment as unstable (Middleton, 2018). In support of Schmidt's research, Participant 5 expressed how they would not be able to predict what mood their leader would be in on a given day as, "she was like hot and cold. So she would either be in a great mood, or she would be in a terrible mood and regardless of what we do…she would always gossip about other employees", and that it was part of the reason why she (Participant 5) left the organisation, "… I left for a combination of personal reasons… also just not wanting the uncertainty of like going into work and not knowing what mood someone would be in… …so it was a bit of both." Similarly, Participant 6 shared, "she would sort of switch between like being really funny and jokey with, then all of a sudden…the next day she wouldn't greet me. So, and then I wouldn't know what I did wrong. So it could have been something, I don't know, no idea. She could have just been moody, I don't know, but her behaviour would go up and down all the time…" These fluctuations in mood and behaviour would consequently require the participants to direct most of their energy on trying to decipher what mood their leader would be in, in preparation for any potential outbursts, which could often then take away from subordinates solely focusing on doing their work (Schmidt, 2008).

Breaking Down of Supportive Team Relations & Playing Staff Against Each Other

In this study, it appears that some participants noted that their leaders tried blocking them, the subordinates, from formulating close relationships or from providing support for one another. The leaders seemed to have perceived these friendship groups as threats to their power/control over individuals, as these subordinates that grouped themselves were most likely to share their encounters of the leader, and thus build the courage to do something about the leaders behaviour, through working together in building a case against the leader (i.e. reporting the leaders behaviour to senior management). Participant 4 shared, "it was supportive initially…uhm and it did, it grouped us together and at the start we had each other…but as soon as she saw that…she started manipulating…so she broke it off…like she didn't, she didn't like it… and she did so by actually physically removing one person from the project…she fired him…and then that caused the distrust, she said, *I'm firing him because there was too much talking between you guys and*…" and that, "she was manipulating us and she had us playing against each other…". Similarly, Participant 5 indicated, "they were very clever and strategic in that they started to poke holes in that like…strong...team presence... they like played people up against each other". Participant 6 expressed that, "I'd also felt like she would be playing a lot of games. Furthermore, Participant 7 stated that, "she planned it so that we each had scheduled tea breaks, so they didn't overlap so we wouldn't be talking and stuff during tea and lunch used to be like that as well, we could go heat up our food but had to come back at our desks and eat". Thus the toxic leaders sought to protect themselves and safeguard their power through ensuring that their subordinates did not form strong coalitions. Furthermore, it is generally easier to target (bully) individuals rather than groups as groups are more inclined to work together and push back.

In further support for this evidence, in their study on organisational politics, Kipnis, Schmidt and Wilkinson (1980) found that obtaining support from colleagues reduces the bullying effects on the individual, as subordinates become aware that they are not the only targets. They also similarly found that leaders tend to put in place prohibitions on group support through either threatening job security or manipulating their teams (Kipnis et al., 1980). Participant 4 expressed how their leader was constantly suspicious of them, "…had complete distrust in everybody…", and therefore tried to control for the situation through being calculating, "…she was manipulating us and she had us playing against each other…", so she would for example, "…openly talk about people behind their backs, so she would be sitting over there, while a colleague of mine will be sitting over there…and she would come to me and say, *you know,*

*that Person X does not know what she's doing and you need to help Person X…*but Person X is sitting right there…". Likewise, Participant 5 shared how calculating their leader was, "it was lies and manipulations and half-truths from day one", and how they were amused by their influence on people, "like spark that insecurity and how they would think that it was funny", and she also provided an example of how their leader would work to break the strong team presence through singling out individuals, "when I started working there, there was like a bunch of interns who were very unhappy, and the leader took me for breakfast one day and said, *tell me exactly what they're saying*".

Following the analysis of the transcripts and trying to make sense of the commonalities in the coded data, all the aforementioned themes addressed the traits of the toxic leader as well as the havoc that they wreak amongst their teams. The following theme basically describes the aftermath of toxic leadership – Individual and Organisational Destruction.

A Trail of Decimation & Destruction – The toxic leader as a Plague and the Aftermath on the Individual and the Organisation

Individual

Loss of Confidence and Emotional Breakdown

The most prevalent theme for this study based on the extensive reports of the participants in the study, is the effects that the toxic leader had on the individual (subordinate). What the participants of this study have particularly revealed is that, working for the leader has had a significantly deleterious impact on their self-confidence. The majority of the participants expressed how they started doubting their abilities. This knock in confidence was mainly ascribable to the constant encounters that left the participants in tears, as the mistreatment would get so intense, that the subordinates would have recurrent emotional breakdowns. The participants frequently mentioned instances of crying because of what the leader had said or done like, *"a lot of the more junior staff would actually leave the office in tears."* (Participant 1); *"…potentially on different days, (there are) thirteen different people that are upset, unhappy, wanting to quit…not coming in the next day cause they don't want to see her…"* (Participant 1); *"people would be crying, actually crying, managers crying saying she said this to me. Every day was a different story…he said this, or she said this…"* (Participant 3); *"I was crying ALLTHE TIME…and it got to the point where I didn't care that I was crying and people were seeing me…because in the beginning you go to the bathroom and you cry, but we were having like arguments out front…"* (Participant 4); *"in my internship I literally used to go to the bathroom to cry...because I hated my internship I hated my life...(I) just (sat) in the*

bathroom and cred for thirty minutes and (would then) say cool now get back to work..." (Participant 5); *"I was almost in tears every day"* (Participant 6); *"I remember getting into the car and" (having and) "an absolute breakdown… I was like hyperventilating"* (Participant 6); *"often but I had promised myself that I would never cry in front of her so I used to go to the bathroom and cry cause I didn't want to be seen as weak, which is probably not a good thing I should've probably acted vulnerable in front of her to show her that I am a person"* (Participant 7); *"I would go home and I would literally cry about it, and I didn't really tell anyone about it till I told my mom that I'm thinking of looking for another job, and she asked why, and I told her about this certain leader and yeah..."* (Participant 8). Consequently, the build-up of the constant emotional distress, lead to participants believing that they were incompetent, and so they mentioned things like, *"she really took a knock on my confidence"* and *"I wasn't myself…and I wasn't myself for long and looking back at it… it got to the point where my parents were saying to me…how much do I need to pay to get you out of this contract, because you are so unhappy…"* (Participant 4); *"I think it knocks your confidence because when you get told everyday this is not good enough, that's not good enough... you think oh my gosh what can I do but think it definitely knocks your confidence"* (Participant 5); *"like I questioned like basically what I was doing, what I was here for or why… I was just drowning and not coping."* (Participant 6); *"it really affected me in my confidence in the way I did work and, and just generally feeling really upset all the time…knocked my self-esteem quite a bit"* (Participant 6); *"I was really motivated, I was eager to learn, I was asking a lot of questions, asking for work...and I just stopped doing that..."* (Participant 8); *"I really did start doubting myself and my capabilities...yeah and I stopped wanting to prove myself and to show what I am capable of at work."* (Participant 8). Thus, these findings reaffirm, Hogh, Mikkelsen and Hansen (2011) and Ashforths (1994) claims that being exposed to extremely hostile and malicious leader behaviour has severely adverse effects on subordinate, such as, and immense feelings of stress, and greatly reduced self-confidence and productivity.

Psychological and Physical Symptoms

Previous studies on Toxic Leadership have found that individuals who are exposed to Toxic Leadership suffer from poor health outcomes such as impaired psychological wellbeing, depression and anxiety and emotional exhaustion and burnout. Further, they tend to suffer from impaired physical wellbeing outcomes like for example, having headaches, back pains, stomach disorders etc. (Ashforth, 1994; Burton & Hoobler, 2006; Lian, Ferris, & Brown, 2012; Tepper, 2007). Similarly in this study, participants seemed to suffer from comparable

outcomes. Examples of psychological symptoms referenced by participants include things like, *"Mentally, it was a drain…"* (Participant 1); *"(like a)…breakdown uhm and then just in terms of not wanting to go back to work, feeling a little bit depressed, so not really wanting to wake up or…or…you know do things…just completely despondent"* (Participant 6); *"I was exceptionally tired…incredibly tired …so, it was dead tiring, dead tiring"* (Participant 1); *"I was completely drained, yeah. It was very exhausting"* (Participant 1); *"yes it cascaded down to me being exhausted"* (Participant 3); *"and I felt like I was just completely burnt out..."* (Participant 6); *"my attitude was also just really bad…so I wasn't really positive all the time…and people saw that I was, they could physically see that I was going through a hard time…because I was always so angry and upset…"* (Participant 6); and *"I had a migraine for three days, and I couldn't shake it. When, if I get them, I get them really badly…" (She then decided to go and seek help from her GP and) "when I heard she was booking me off for two weeks, just to be at home…I just burst out crying, I said to her, thank you so much, cause I don't think I can go back to the office…I'm flat", she was further referred to a specialist and was told "you're not going back to work for three months, she said, like you are so burnt out, and I had shot up my uhm adrenaline gram…my adrenal glands. She's like, you're completely depleted…deleted!"* (Participant 1). According to Schaufeli and Bakker (2004), burnout is a state of mental exhaustion, whereby engagement is the direct opposite as it is characterised by involvement, energy and efficacy. The above symptoms described by the participants are clear instances of being completely disengaged and therefore burnout, as participants emotional resources are drained and they generally evaluate their work experiences negatively (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

Examples of physiological symptoms experienced by the participants included: *"I have never had tonsillitis before and I started work and I was fine, and as soon as I started working with this toxic leader, worked with her for 10 months, I had tonsillitis seven times and when I left the project I didn't have it as often"* (Participant 7); *"There was the eczema and a lot of breakouts and lots of grey hair that I discovered in the bathrooms."* (Participant 7). These symptoms are characteristic physiological stress responses that develop as a result of the activation of the sympathetic nervous system, where catecholamines are released from the adrenal glands and immune defences or dysfunctions such as physiological impairment (Hansen, Hogh, Persson, Karlson, Garde, & Ørbaek, 2006; Steptoe & Ayers, 2004; Vie, Glasø, & Einarsen, 2012).

Blurring of Boundaries – The Spill-over Effects of Work to Home Life

Closely linked to the burnout and exhaustion described above is another theme which unfortunately has not particularly been explored by previous studies on toxic leadership being – the effects that the toxic leader's behaviour has on an individual's personal life. With regards to the effect on their personal life, participants largely revealed that, owing to how draining it was dealing with the toxic leader, their relationships with their friends and family suffered. Participant 1 expressed how exhausted she would be from dealing with the toxic leader, that *"…on weekends, I would just… I'd be flat…I'd just be like at home, recovering".* Participant 7 similarly expressed how she *"…became also so lethargic almost in everything that people wanna go out, but I would just want to stay at home and be alone"*. She furthermore added that because the leader affected her self-confidence she would not want to engage with her colleagues and friends and family, due to fearing their judgement, so she expressed that, *"I would get into this cocoon and just don't wanna talk to anyone, don't want to engage with people because it is a form of an abusive relationship in a sense, that you do not want to talk to people about it, you feel she is reacting because you are incompetent"* consequently *"for the whole ten months I felt like I couldn't do anything right, and I took that home with me, and it impacted my relationships at home, and I actually would get at home, I'm so exhausted, I don't want to have to do anything cause I don't want someone to tell me again that I haven't done it right or tell yourself that I haven't made this dinner properly or haven't done this properly"*. In contrast to Participant 1 wanting to do nothing over the weekend, Participant 3 expressed how *"in essence I even worked on Saturday, Sundays…trying to cover up what I didn't have time for, my own personal time, uhm I can't balance it because uhm…I actually have three lives…its ahhh…one it's the organization, there's the client, then there's my personal life…and the trade-off was that my personal life got affected because I need to balance these two…uhm…I don't have as much social time as I would have wanted…"*. Participant 4 however shared the same sentiments as her personal life also took strain. She shared that *"I was newly married, it caused a lot of strain on my marriage because every single time I spoke to my husband I was either in tears, uhm and so frustrated with work that he, got to the point where he couldn't hear me complain anymore…"*, so she didn't *"…feel like I could rely on my partner for any support…he couldn't give it to me, he was just too frustrated…so even though he wanted to, so a, he was angry…he had enough…so I also couldn't talk to him too much about it because I knew the impact it had on him… he just…had, I mean he said he had enough of me phoning him crying…"* (Participant 4). She further added that, *"it also put a lot of strain*

on my friendships, so I was working with a friend, and…a very very close friend, because she was so manipulative, she kind of had us play against each other too…and that put a lot of strain on us…" (Participant 4). Similarly, Participant 5 shared, *"like my relationships suffered cause I was always tired after work…I didn't wanna go out… I was always working... on holidays and weekends"*. While Participant 6 expressed that, *"basically I never had time to do anything else other than work on the project or on the on my internship stuff so I never got...I never really had a personal life for those few months..."* so, *"I had no...first of all I had no work-life balance...I was always working and it affected me even more because I wanted to see my friends or see my family so it made me even more upset or depressed and...uhm...I didn't have a life like outside of work because of that project"*, and eventually (I) *"just wasn't interested in doing the things which I usually love to do which is like horse riding, that sort of thing"*. The toxic leader therefore seemed to place tremendous strain on their subordinate's personal relationships and drove a wedge between participants and their sources of support – with sources of support, such as family members and friends withdrawing from participants as they just cannot continuously hear about the abuse that the participants were suffering.

Poor Eating and Sleeping Patterns

With regards to eating and sleeping patterns, the Participants of this study also expressed how they would either eat too little or eat too much, and how they would also, either sleep too little or sleep too much, (symptoms typical of stress and depression). Participant 1 shared that her eating patterns were affected as, *"it was so much effort for me. I actually make food for one, so I'll just be like, uhh… don't worry about it…*yeah*…I did eat less, uhm and sometimes I'd just have like tea and rusks, at night….cause that was the easiest thing to make.."* and so *"I ate anything that was like super easy, I just felt like I had no energy to eat anything"*. Conversely, Participants 4, 6 and 7 shared how they would eat too much, and unhealthily, as they mentioned things like, *"eating habits, like very, I was very unhealthy…cause it wasn't a priority…I had to get up early so, get to work and just have some cereal which was…and then chips or whatever…I would, there was…I wasn't focusing on my health so I wasn't doing any gym, no like nothing…"* (Participant 4); *"I think I also probably gained weight…*laughs*…because I…I eat when I get stressed"* (Participant 6); *"I also eat terribly so it's just a lot of junk food which is obviously bad for you especially for ten months"* (Participant 7). Regarding sleeping patterns, Participant 4 expressed how she slept excessively because, *"I was always, always tired…I did sleep probably like too much though…"* and that because she *"…slept too much then and struggled to get up…there was just, there was no drive, no…no drive at all…it was*

awful". On the other hand, Participant 1 and 6 expressed how they struggled sleeping as, *"I couldn't actually ever switch off"* (Participant 1) and *"my sleeping pattern was really, really disturbed…because…I would, I would try and go to bed, because then I could, I would try and go to bed early so that I could get up early in the morning and uhm I had an hour's drive to wherever …but I would go to bed and my mind would be like, I got to do this tomorrow, I gotta do that tomorrow… I would sometimes go to…like only fall asleep at say like two o'clock in the morning…and then I'm up at six, so I'd be like…God I'm so tired…but I, I couldn't switch my brain off and I was also dreaming about the project, so I'd be dreaming how our meeting would play out…"* (Participant 1); *"yeah I wasn't sleeping nicely and when I did sleep, I had nightmares all the time"* (Participant 6). Studies on insomnia have indicated that prolonged periods of lack of sleep are most likely to result in major depressive illnesses (depression), and have dire consequences for physical health such as weakened immune system functioning, fatigue and even cardiac conditions (Ohayon, 2002; Roth, 2007). Thus, prolonged exposure to Toxic Leadership may result in rather awful wellbeing-related consequences for the individual.

Dissociative Symptoms and Symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress

Furthermore, Participant 1 interestingly shared an instance when she was declared medically burnout and even experienced severe mental stress in the form of dissociative, fugue-like symptoms. She described instances where, *"I drove out my complex and I was going to work…and I was driving, there's a stop street…and I was driving towards the stop street and I thought...I had no idea where I'm going…I'm like, I know I got to get to work, but I have no idea…its, it was terrifying because I thought, I don't know where to go at the stop street. I'm like, do I go left, straight or right..."* and that *"I couldn't remember my surname the one day"* The above references are clear examples dissociative disorders, where an individual experiences a disconnection between their memories, actions, thoughts and surroundings (Spielgel & Cardena, 1991). "Memory as a function of the living personality can be understood as a capacity for the organization and reconstruction of past experiences and impressions in the service of present needs, fears, and interests" (Van der Kolk, 1994; p.3). As noted by the DSM, trauma can often result in one of two extremes: retention or forgetting, where traumatic stress can either cause memory loss or heightened attentiveness (Scaer, 2014). In relation to the references provided above, dissociative disorders such as memory loss were experienced by the participant due to subconscious efforts to achieve self-conservation (Scaer, 2014).

Participant 4 on the other hand shared how, *"I started a new project and went to…I've just started a new project, but I was doing research and shadowing…and I went to Company X, and I've never…when I walked in there…and I had a flash of, of what my time was like at Company Y…and I… yes, yeah…and I just burst out crying…it just all came back…"*. This encounter may be deemed as indicative of Participant 4 having Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), as her unpleasant memories of working with the toxic leader were triggered by a cue, or setting that was similar to the time that she worked with the toxic leader. From the evidence above, it is apparent that Toxic Leadership has rather adverse effects on subordinate's physical and mental wellbeing.

Decimation of staff

A great deal of evidence from this study suggested that the toxic leader raised the attrition levels of their organisation. A number of the participants emphasised how they watched many of their colleagues leave, and how they would have, without a doubt, left the organisation had they continued working with the toxic leader on other projects. Participant 3 specifically stressed the fact that a number of people had left the organisation because of the leader - and that this was known as those people who left mentioned the leader in their exit interviews. Participant 3 mentioned that, *"that person actually raised our attrition, uhm and has been named in a lot of, about five consecutive exit interviews…where people are leaving the organization and have mentioned this person's name…"* and that, *"the attrition was high; the morale level was low"*, so for the people who decided to stay and continue working with the leader, their drive and self-confidence was low, which in turn affected their performance. Likewise, Participant 5 shared that, *"someone would leave the business every three months…so three to four months like clockwork someone would resign. And I think that makes you feel unstable, makes you feel like you can't build relationships because you become vulnerable (if you) build a relationship with someone and (then) they leave"*, while Participant 6 stated that had she continued working with the toxic leader, *"the only option would have been for me to leave"*. These findings are similar to Schyns & Schilling's (2013) study's findings, where they found significant positive correlations between destructive leader behaviours with negative outcomes such as turnover intention. Thus it can be argued that toxic leader behaviours significantly impact on the wellbeing and satisfaction of subordinates, to the point where subordinates cannot take any more of the leaders bullying and consequently decide to resign.

Organisational

According to Pettelier (2010), toxic leadership has, in the long run, detrimental consequences for the organisation as the subordinates exposed to it are inclined to engage in counterproductive work behaviours such as tardiness, absenteeism, workplace aggression, etc. Also lack of organisational commitment and decline in organizational citizenship behaviours. Subordinates are said to adopt such behaviours so as to reciprocate the perceived injustices inflicted by the toxic leader, as a result, this negatively impacts the not only the quality of work produced by the individual but also the productivity of the organisation as a whole. In this study, it seemed that majority of the participants became resentful towards their leader and their organisation, thus they deliberately adopted "don't care" attitudes towards their work and also wilfully chose to do the bare minimum. Participant 5 expressed how she eventually became tired, uninterested and apathetic, hence engaging in small rebellious acts so as to avenge herself to the toxic leader. She shared how, *"I think towards the end I got a bit "fuck-you" about it…like they needed me, more than I needed them because uhm… I was the one who was holding the team together and I stopped caring about what they thought…and it was like a rebellious…a liberating rebellious feeling…to be like "oh his phone, I don't feel like answering that right now…sorry I can't take it right now…". Like little rebellions that are like childish, but show uhm…like he made me, and how she made me feel like fed up…at the end I was just like "fuck this shit", I deserve better, I'm not doing this anymore…"* (Participant 5). Similarly, Participant 4 expressed how her leader was never satisfied with her work and always criticised her, so she eventually just didn't care about anything, *"…because I was so angry…that I was doing the bare minimum, because, I mean meeting minutes, for example that was one of the requirements…they were never ever good enough…so if something is never good enough, you actually get to the point that why must I put in my all because, you're going to find something wrong anyway…"*. Participant 6 also shared how, *"also another coping mechanism for me was just like I don't care, like if there's a mistake in this worksheet I actually don't care…which is a huge risk was for a company, especially like a reputational risk…"*, and that, *"during those months I think I took more sick days than I've ever taken…*laughs*…just sometimes waking up just really not wanting to go to work and thinking of any excuse just not to go… I wasn't actually sick…uhm I just really needed a break"*. Participant 7 stated that it, *"started to create what was this negative environment…there was a lot of resentment towards the leader"*. While finally, Participant 3 expressed, *"it then resulted in uhm, people not participating in the organization a lot…ahhh attrition was high…"*. From these statements it can therefore be

inferred how the organisations in question encountered a loss, especially in productivity and effectiveness as employees' morale and basic motivation were low.

Furthermore in a study carried out by Einarsen, Aasland and Skogstad (2007) they defined destructive leadership (which constitutes a large part of toxic leadership) in terms of the leader engaging in behaviours that infringe on the legitimate interests of the organisation through sabotaging organisational objectives, resources, undertakings and efficiency, in addition to the drive, fulfilment and wellbeing of their subordinates. Walton (2007) similarly maintained that toxic leaders look to undermine organisational goals through demeaning their subordinates, consequently threatening organisational success. In this study however, different results were found in terms of the leader working to sabotage organisational goals. What the evidence from this study suggests, is that the leader affects organisational performance and objectives through destroying their subordinates or work teams morale, motivation engagement and wellbeing, but are however, invested in the organisations interests and work hard to achieve results. Participant 3 expressed how people were unexcited about going to work, and how they were always on edge as, *"you can see that the person is always coming to work, they are not motivated, they are not even uhm…they are always stressed"* and the *"lack of energy, lack of motivation, at one time I even thought I would leave because of this person…yeah"*. Participant 5 shared how *"…there was definitely a lack of engagement"* and how most people generally lacked interest in what they were doing, which eventually affected individual and team performance. So, while the toxic leader is strongly focused on achieving organisational success in order to make themselves look good, they do so while breaking down their employees and minimising employee achievements so that they and only they can be accredited with the successes achieved. The toxic leader therefore (counterproductively) has a significantly negative effect on employee motivation, satisfaction and commitment, therefore affecting organisational effectiveness (Mehta & Maheshwari, 2013).The present chapter has outlined a number of themes that emerged from the data and aligned them to the literature. The following sections will examine the implications of these findings, the limitations of the study and recommendations for future research.

3.3. Implications of Study

This qualitative study offered a thorough account of a sample of consultants' subjective experiences of toxic leadership in the work context. Consequently, the findings of this study can contribute to the shortage of research on Toxic Leadership, specifically in South Africa,

where there are to the researchers knowledge, no existing qualitative studies on Toxic Leadership. The current study and its findings further contribute to the practice of industrial psychology as well as the consulting industry through providing invaluable insight into subordinates' perceptions of toxic leadership within this particular environment. In addition, the study provides detailed insights into the effects that toxic leaders have had, not only on the ability of subordinates to work effectively, but also on their sense of self, their psychological and physical wellbeing. These findings can hopefully make organisations aware of the Toxic Leadership phenomena, and furthermore afford them with the necessary measures for identifying Toxic Leadership and circumventing the presence of this phenomenon within the workplace.

As such, these findings can enhance organisations understanding of which behaviours portrayed by toxic leaders, are most likely to have an impact on subordinates wellbeing, as well as the likelihood of them being absent from work, or leaving the organisation. It can further be established, from the findings of this study, that toxic leaders truly have the capacity to produce toxic spaces in organisations through poisoning the work environment. Some of the effects of toxic leadership highlighted by this study's findings include: individual and organisational outcomes such as - increased life and work dissatisfaction, increased intention to leave, actual staff turnover, reduced work engagement, decreased organizational effectiveness, poor motivation and staff morale, increased absenteeism and (more particularly for the individual) psychological and psychological illness. Consequently since the side effects that toxic leaders have on subordinates and the organisation are now known by means of this study's findings, these findings can therefore be used by organisations to design interventions to not only mitigate these effects on employees, but also to at least circumvent or completely eradicate toxic leadership from the workplace.

Considering that the effects of toxic leadership may be far-reaching, and may eventually affect organisational outcomes and effectiveness, interventions in the event of evidence of toxic leadership that may mitigate the presence of toxic leadership therefore become crucial. If it is found that toxic leaders are present within an organisation, completely eliminating them by dismissing them from the organisation may not necessarily be plausible, thus adopting interventions is a matter that organisations need to seriously consider. Possible interventions that can be implemented form the practical perspective are discussed below.

3.4 Practical Implications

There are a number of practical implications arising from this study. The following discussion outlines the possible preventative and corrective interventions that could be implemented by organisations.

In looking to possibly prevent or else remedy the effects of toxic leadership, organisations should primarily work towards creating what is called a 'positive safety climate' (PSC), as well as systems of 'perceived organisational support' (POS) (Bernstein & Trim, 2016). In adopting these approaches and having them imbedded within the organisations philosophy, this can help in placing an emphasis on the value of employee physical and psychological wellbeing (Williams, 2018). Further, these can help foster a form of cultural reinforcement, where an environment of zero tolerance to destructive behaviours such as toxic leader behaviours, is upheld and maintained by all employees (Appelbaum & Roy-Girard, 2007). To achieve these, organisations would need to start with promoting constructive leadership behaviours in which leaders display positive behaviours, demonstrating to their teams what appropriate behaviours towards others in the organisation are, and also creating an awareness of what is deemed acceptable and unacceptable within the organisation (Bernstein & Trim, 2016). Employing constructive leadership behaviours can further warrant that there are consistent penalties for each time an instance(s) of toxic leadership takes place.

Following this, there are a few primary and/or secondary interventions that can be adopted. A prerequisite of these interventions is that they are advocated and supported from top management and then passed down to the rest of the organisation (Cooper-Thomas, Gardner, O'Driscoll, Catley, Bentley, & Trenberth, 2013). Examples of primary interventions include introducing policies and procedures and/or legislature (Bernstein & Trim, 2016; Fox & Stallworth, 2005). Introducing these can help with reducing the manifestation and repetition of toxic leadership in the organisation, in addition to explicitly communicating to all stakeholders that toxic leadership will not be tolerated (Bernstein & Trim, 2016; Fox & Stallworth, 2005). Having a legislative framework in place that summarises organisational expectations, guidelines as well as sanctions for misconduct (i.e. engaging in toxic leadership behaviours), can help make known to employees what the organisations culture is in terms of toxic leadership being completely unacceptable (Bernstein & Trim, 2016; Richards & Daley, 2003).

Examples of secondary interventions, on the other hand, include actions like sensitising everyone in the organisation to the behaviours and standards that are expected from everyone through training, as well as making known the organisations culture in terms of safeguarding

the wellbeing of every stakeholder and preventing or reducing toxic leadership in the workplace (Pearson, Andersson, & Porath, 2000).

Alternatively, as a corrective measure, training can be made available for leaders who are identified as exhibiting toxic behaviour. This training can work to help these leaders to better manage their personality/destructive behaviour (Bernstein & Trim, 2016). In the training, the leaders should be informed or reminded that their behaviour will not be tolerated, and they should also be coached on how to improve their communication and general approach towards their teams. Should the toxic leadership persist post training, then the sanctions as specified in the organisations policies can then be pursued (Bernstein & Trim, 2016).

In terms of the victims of toxic leadership, organisations should firstly endeavour to raise awareness about toxic leadership in the event that employees may be exposed to it, however, owing to a lack of knowledge of the leadership style, choose to keep quiet about their experiences, and thus forgoing getting the necessary assistance. When employees are aware of the toxic leadership phenomenon, this may assist them in better identifying such leaders - combating its effects not only on the individuals affected, but also for the organisation as a whole. Employee support programmes that offer counselling and training should then be employed (Branch, Ramsay & Barker, 2013). These programmes can be employed to promote the development of skills (i.e. emotional and behavioural) that can help subordinates better handle their interactions with toxic leaders. Often the effects of toxic leadership are so severe that the subordinates who were exposed to it may continue needing help long after their exposure to toxic leadership has ended (Schyns & Schilling, 2013). Thus, similar to victims of bullying, it can take subordinates who have been previously exposed to toxic leadership months or even years to recover from the effects of the toxic leadership due to the severity of the impact. These individuals can experience a sense of loss of reputation and self-confidence as well as feelings of injustice or unfairness due to the way that they were treated by their leader (Bernstein & Trim, 2016). Through investing in anti-toxic leadership programmes, a culture of proactive health and safety can be embraced, making individuals more liable to assert themselves and seek help, instead of avoiding the issue and doing nothing (Bernstein & Trim, 2016).

Through engaging in small activities like the ones mentioned above, organisations can immensely impact on the lives of the employees who may be expected to work with toxic leaders, and in the long run, this may work to benefit the organisation. Nonetheless, a

substantial body of work still needs to be done to assess the effectiveness of the abovementioned interventions as well as to establish more problem-specific interventions for combating the toxic leadership phenomena in the workplace.

3.5. Limitations of the present research

Although noteworthy findings and potential practical contributions were provided, this study did however also bear certain limitations. These limitations are as follows:

The first shortcoming of this study was that the demographic makeup of the sample was not fully representative of South African population demographics. The majority of the sample was made up of White females. In taking into account the diversity of the South African population, especially in terms of race, it is important that South African specific studies incorporate people from different backgrounds so as to warrant the generalisability of the results obtained. The sample for this study consisted of mostly white individuals (n = 6), and in taking into account the South African population, White people constitute only 7.8% (StatsSA, 2018) of the entire South African population, while in contrast, Black people, for example, constitute an overwhelming 80.9% (StatsSA, 2018). From these statistics, it is quite clear that the sample of this study was not representative of the South African population as there are substantially more people of colour than Whites. Owing to this misrepresentation of the different racial groups within the country, it would therefore be impractical to generalise the results of this study across the different race groups. Further, women constitute only 51% (StatsSA, 2018) of the South African population. As 87.5% (n = 7) of the sample for this study were female, this is clearly not representative of the South African gender distribution. The study included no Coloured or Indian/Asian individuals and this also acts as a further limitation in terms of race groupings.

Another shortcoming of this study was the data collection method, being interviews. Face-to-face interviews always risk having participants being dishonest about their accounts and imparting information which they think will make the researcher happy (Barriball & While, 1994). Furthermore, comprehending the participant's different perceptions is crucial as the way in which people act and experience toxic leadership and make decisions can be forecasted by their sense of self-awareness, versus their objective reality (Qenani et al., 2014).

Further, the self-report nature of the data collection technique is another source that is subject to scrutiny. Owing to the information collected having been contingent on the participant's subjective assessments of toxic leadership, the participant's responses may have therefore been

predisposed to social desirability bias. This essentially means that participants may have responded to the questions in a manner that may have made the situation appear less negative than it really was (Spector, 1994), therefore artificially understating the harm or effects of toxic leadership on them. Participants may have done so due to fearing being labelled or stigmatized as being a victim's of toxic leadership. Participants may have also feared coming across as vulnerable to the admission of being ill-treated, and therefore may have not answered the questions asked in their interview honestly (Mikkelsen & Einersen, 2003; Shams, 2012). Cilliers (2012) describes this behaviour in terms of the psychodynamic defence known as splitting. Splitting is a defence which individuals adopt to oppose feelings of persecutory anxiety (Cilliers, 2012; Sievers, 2009). Splitting manifests when one faces performance anxiety or the fear of failing, which usually results in humiliation (Lewis, 2004; Sievers, 2009). The participants of the study are also subject to having been in denial. Denial, unlike splitting, entails the blocking of events like toxic leadership (which are deemed as external dangers) from ones consciousness (Cilliers, 2012). Through being in denial, or engaging the denial defence, anxiety is however just temporarily reduced as realistically speaking, the alleged "bad" or "danger" lingers in the subconscious (Stapely, 1996). Further, the literature on psychodynamic defences describes phenomenon such as bullying (which constitutes a large part of toxic leadership) systematic contests of privilege, power and rank that are used as either interpersonal or intergroup behavioural dynamics between the perpetrator and their target – i.e. the subordinate (Rayner, Hoel, & Cooper, 2002). Toxic leadership, like bullying, can therefore produce high levels of anxiety within an organisation, which then can get acted against by means of adopting psychodynamic defences (Cilliers, 2012). To reduce social desirability bias, the researcher emphasised to participants that they would remain anonymous, and that their responses would only be used for academic reasons, so in no way will anyone be able to trace their responses to them. Future research should also consider using a range of qualitative data resources like focus groups or methods of observation in order to foster the accuracy of the accounts provided by participants (Anastasi & Urbina, 1997; Miles & Shevlin, 2001).

Additionally, because the researcher was the primary instrument for data collection in this study, her personal reflections and understanding of the collected data may have been influenced by her expectations, biases, beliefs and knowledge of official research (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). However, as mentioned, to address this in as far as is possible, the researcher formed an awareness of her anticipations, beliefs, values and opinions by keeping a self-reflexive journal during the course of the project (Fossey et al., 2002).

Finally, the fact that the participants sampled for this study were all from the same industry, that is, the consulting space, the scope for generalising the results obtained from this study to other industries may be limited. This constraint is mainly attributable to the differences in the on-the-job demands that are necessitated by different industries, of which some, like in the consulting industry, may allow the toxic leader to thrive.

3.6. Recommendations for future research

While this study accomplished its aim of contributing to the lack of research, specifically qualitatively inclined research, on Toxic Leadership in South Africa, there are however a number of opportunities for future research.

Firstly, owing to the lack of knowledge of this leadership style and how it therefore affects individuals and organisations exposed to it, an emphasis is then placed on the need for more research on it to be carried out, more specifically on creating interventions, or precautionary measures to help organisations confront this problem. Prior to being able to successfully combat Toxic Leadership in the workplace, it is firstly essential that organisations are able to identify or diagnose whether such leaders are present. Future research should therefore look to develop a framework that organisations can follow in the primary diagnosis Toxic Leadership from which the most fitting intervention for dealing with the problem can therefore be adopted. In essence, in addition to creating organisational awareness around Toxic Leadership, it is also important that research affords organisations with the necessary information pertaining to guidelines on how to tackle Toxic Leadership in the workplace.

With the aim of establishing a thorough understanding of Toxic Leadership, future studies should also consider incorporating demographically diverse people, people from different industries, and people who hold different positions within an organisation. By doing so, this can work to improve the generalisability of the results obtained by studies to the South African workforce.

With regards to demographics, it would be more suitable for future studies to take into account the demographic breakdown of the South African population in order to ensure that the results obtained are more South African context specific and are therefore more relatable to the South African workforce. Furthermore, it may be meaningful to establish how specific demographic features such as race, gender and age may impact on an individual's predisposition to become a toxic leader's target, in addition to the extensiveness of the toxic leader's mistreatment

towards them, so as to assist organisations in detecting patterns in the toxic leader's target groups.

Incorporating people from different industries will possibly emphasise the pervasiveness of toxic leadership, consequently reinforcing the need for South African organisations to be aware of the reach and severity of Toxic Leadership on the workforce. It may also be useful to compare and contrast the prevalence of Toxic Leadership in certain industries as opposed to others, so as to assist in pinpointing the conditions under which toxic leaders are most liable to thrive.

Moreover, future studies should look to investigate the impact that toxic leaders have on people other than their immediate subordinates. As it has been demonstrated in this study, toxic leaders can impact other leaders through creating an emotional burden that is often due to and directed at fostering support for affected subordinates. So it would be worthwhile to explore the effects that toxic leaders have on the different groups of people they come across.

Finally, it is proposed that a longitudinal study should be done to comprehensively track the long term effects that Toxic Leadership has on both the individuals who were previously exposed to it, as well as the organisations in which toxic leaders worked for considerable periods of time (for example, comparing turnover rates- before and after).

3.7. General Conclusion

In the introduction it was stated that this study was aimed at exploring subordinates' subjective experiences of toxic leadership within the South African context and that it intended to present a qualitative account of toxic leadership within the workplace through thoroughly exploring and unpacking subordinates lived experiences of toxic leadership within the work environment. An interest in these perceptions and/or experiences was initiated by the severely negative impacts that Toxic Leadership has been found to have on the wellbeing, not only of the subordinates who are exposed to it, but also for the organisation at large. Additionally, not many studies have been conducted on toxic leadership in the workplace, particularly within the South African context. As a result, this study was unique with regards to the insights and recommendations it offered for South African organisations. What was exhibited by this study, was the need for organisations to be mindful of this leadership style, and having such leaders within the organisation as they may have dire consequences for individuals, work teams as well as overall organisational effectiveness.

Based on the results obtained for this study, the study can in theory add value to Toxic Leadership literature and its conclusions. Despite these contributions, the Toxic Leadership topic still needs to be further investigated. Within this particular study, the scope was limited in terms of the sample having been demographically unrepresentative of the South African workforce, as well as in terms of the sample being from a single industry, i.e. the consulting industry. New research therefore needs to be conducted on a broader variety of participants, from a wider range of industries. This could potentially contribute towards a better understanding of Toxic Leadership and its several outcomes, in addition to assisting organisations better preventing, diagnosing and dealing with cases of toxic leadership within the work environment.

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Appendix A: Participant Information Sheet

Psychology

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Tel: 011 717 4503 Fax: 011 717 4559

Date: July 2018

Dear Sir / Madam

Good Day

My name is Neo Selepe and I am currently studying towards obtaining my Master's degree in Organisational Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand. As part of the requirements for this degree, I am required to conduct a research project. My research focuses on the experiences of people who have been exposed to toxic leadership and aims to explore and unpack the subjective experiences of people who have been exposed to toxic leadership in the workplace. To carry out this research project, I would therefore like to invite you to participate in this study. Please note that in order to participate, you must be over the age of 18, and have had experience or been exposed to toxic leadership in your workplace.

Participation in this study will involve taking part in an interview that should take approximately one hour to complete. Please note that participating in the interview process is completely voluntary and you will be not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way for choosing or not choosing to take part in the study. The current study is in no way connected with your organisation/employer therefore it can be guaranteed to you that your organisation/ employer will in no way be made aware of your participation in this study. Due to the face-to-face nature of the interview, anonymity cannot be established however confidentiality will be assured, as there will be no identifying information present in any written report or any possible journal article or conference presentation that may follow. While questions will be asked about your personal circumstances, no identifying information, such as your name or the name of your manager/organisation you work for will be mentioned. Pseudonyms will be used in place of your name and the name of your manager/organisation in all written reports including the transcripts. Additionally, the interview will take place at a time and venue most suitable for

you. With your permission, all the interview data (audio recordings and transcripts) will also be safely stored away indefinitely in a secure password-protected computer that only the supervisor and researcher have access to. Informed consent will be obtained by the completion of signed consent forms. You will, however, be able to withdraw from the interview at any point and will not face any penalties for doing so. Should you wish to have a copy of the findings of the study, these will be made available upon request. However, these findings will be reported under general themes and therefore will not enable the identification of your individual response.

It must be emphasised that your wellbeing is of utmost importance. Therefore, while no harm is expected to be experienced by any volunteers who complete the interview, should you feel that you need counselling after participating in the study, counselling will be arranged free of charge. This counselling will be provided through the Emthonjeni Centre at the University of the Witwatersrand. Please contact myself or my supervisor should you require us to arrange any counselling or debriefing for you.

Please note that responses obtained from the survey will not be used for any purposes other than academic research. There are no direct benefits for participating in the study. Volunteering to participate in this study would be greatly appreciated though as it will contribute to a larger body of knowledge on toxic leadership and its effect on exposed individuals. Additionally, the findings of this research study could assist in the long term by assisting organisations to act against such leadership thereby protecting employees from its negative outcomes. The research study is an independent study, which will be conducted under the supervision of a registered Industrial Psychologist at the University of the Witwatersrand.

Should you wish to receive feedback for the study a summary of results will be made available upon request. This summary will have all information completely sanitized and therefore no particular interviewee can be identified.

Any ethical queries for the study can be directed to my course coordinator who is also my supervisor. Should you have any other queries, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor. Our contact details are as follows:

Neo Selepe	Dr Colleen Bernstein (supervisor)	Emthonjeni Centre
neoselepe08@gmail.com	colleen.bernstein@wits.ac.za	(011) 717 4513
0789007696	(011) 717 4538	

Appendix B: Participant Consent Form To Be Interviewed

I (the participant) have been given the participant information sheet for the study being conducted by Miss Neo Selepe and supervised by Dr Colleen Bernstein. I have read this information sheet and I understand its contents.

I understand that:

☐ My participation in this research is entirely voluntary, as I am free to choose to participate or not to participate.

☐ I may decide to stop participating at any time during the interview, since there is no penalty for withdrawing or refusing to participate.

☐ I may choose not to answer specific questions and there is no penalty for refusing to address these questions.

☐ All identifying information will be treated with utmost confidentiality through the sanitization of transcriptions.

☐ No names will be recorded on the interview transcriptions for anonymity.

☐ Direct quotes from my interview may be used in transcriptions but under pseudonyms.

☐ Data from my interview will be stored indefinitely in electronic form on a password protected computer in the research supervisor's office (will only be accessible to researcher and research supervisor) and the data from my interview may be used in subsequent publications.

☐ I understand that there are no expected risks or direct benefits from participating in the study however I may request details for counselling after the interview if I wish to do so.

☐ Feedback of the study may be obtained through contacting either the researcher (Miss Neo Selepe) or the research supervisor (Dr Colleen Bernstein)

☐ If I agree to participate, I need to sign this form as proof of my acceptance.

I understand the conditions and accept to participate in this study voluntarily.

Participant signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C: Participant Consent Form to be Audio Recorded

I (the participant) have been given the participant information sheet for the study being conducted by Miss Neo Selepe and supervised by Dr Colleen Bernstein. I have read this information sheet and I understand that the interview will be audio recorded then transcribed, and that these transcriptions will be kept on a password protected computer in an office that is locked and only accessible by the researcher and supervisor of the project.

I also understand that:

☐ My identity will be protected as my name and all identifying information will be sanitized (removed) from all transcriptions of audio-recordings.

☐ Access to the tapes will be restricted to the researcher and the research supervisor and that recordings will be safely kept on a password protected computer in the research supervisor's office until they are destroyed (after transcriptions are done).

☐ Access to transcripts will be restricted to the researcher and the research supervisor and that all transcriptions will be kept safe indefinitely on a password protected computer in the research supervisor's office.

Please accept my signature as my consent to be audio recorded in this interview.

Participant signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix D: Interview Schedule

Respondents' understanding of the meaning of toxic leadership at work and their recounting of the actual events they experienced:

1. What is your understanding of someone who is a "toxic leader"?
2. What does the term "toxic leader" mean to you?
3. What is your experience of the "toxic leader"?
4. What has this person (the toxic leader) done to you?
5. What characteristics and behaviours does this person portray that are "toxic"?

Respondents report of the perceived impact of toxic leadership on their psychological/physiological wellbeing and their personal life:

6. In what manner has toxic leadership impacted you mentally or physically?
7. How has it made you feel about yourself?
8. How has it impacted on you mentally (psychological wellbeing)?
9. How has working with this person affected your self-esteem?
10. How has it impacted on you physically? Have you suffered any physical illnesses that you think are related to the stress of having such a leader?
11. How has working with this person impacted on your personal life/family life?

Respondents report of the perceived impact of toxic leadership upon them their ability to perform at work:

12. How has working with this person impacted on the way you work?
13. How has it impacted on your absenteeism?
14. How has working with this person impacted on your relationship with your colleagues?

15. Are you still in the same job, working with the toxic leader, or did you leave that job? (If not, do you want to leave the organisation and why?).

Questions regarding the interviewees' ability to cope with the toxic leader.

16. How do you cope with working with this person?
17. Have you sought counselling? Why or why not?
18. Have you been able to get support from anyone (family, friends, colleagues), and in what ways have they supported you?
19. Have you spoken to approached anyone in the organisation, i.e. Management or HR, and what were their responses?
20. What do you feel that your organisation can do for you to assist with this problem?

Appendix E: Ethical Clearance Form

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (SCHOOL OF HUMAN & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: MORG/18/009 IH**
PROJECT TITLE:	A qualitative exploration of subordinates' subjective experience of toxic leadership
INVESTIGATORS	Selepe Neo
DEPARTMENT	Psychology
DATE CONSIDERED	28/06/18
DECISION OF COMMITTEE*	Approved

This ethical clearance is valid for 2 years and may be renewed upon application

DATE: 28 June 2018

CHAIRPERSON
(Dr Colleen Bernstein)

cc Supervisor:

Dr Colleen Bernstein
Psychology

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR (S)

To be completed in duplicate and **one copy** returned to the Secretary, Room 100015, 10th floor, Senate House, University.

I/we fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure be contemplated from the research procedure, as approved, I/we undertake to submit a revised protocol to the Committee.

This ethical clearance will expire on 31 December 2020

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER IN ALL ENQUIRIES