The nexus between Narcissist Followers and Leaders-Antecedent for Toxic Leadership

Nirmala Dorasamy
Durban University of Technology, South Africa
nirmala@dut.ac.za

Abstract: Increasingly, it is recognized that organizations have toxic leaders, who harm organizational success. While they harm organizational success, it can be argued that followers who collude are also contributors to such harm. Literature increasingly points to the interrelationship between leaders and organizations and its impact on organizational success. Notably absent is the systematic examination of the toxic relationship between leaders and followers as colluders and its impact on organizational success. The purpose of the paper is to examine the extent to which followers as colluders reinforce toxic leadership through the relational aspects. The focus is on active, destructive and unethical leaders within the negative leadership continuum, since it is difficult to claim that behaviours representing passiveness and incompetence are equally negative. Through a relational approach to leadership study, the situated commonality between leaders and followers is explored to show that manifestations of narcissism in both leaders and followers who collude in perpetuating toxic leadership can cause organizations to drift into failure. The paper does not consider leadership in any organizational or situational context. The study's methodology contributes to the objective of the research. The use of a qualitative research method was useful in arguing the exhibitionism of narcissism not only among leaders, but also followers. This method aligns with the purpose of the study. There is a paucity of literature on how the relational aspects of the leader-follower dynamic influence the toxic leadership/ followership reality. The relevancy of the study not only contributes to the literature on toxic leadership, but more specifically showing how narcissist followers as colluders influence narcissist leaders in a toxic leadership relationship. By examining the toxic leader/ follower relationship, a richer understanding of toxic followers can possibly emerge. This is important, since leaders do not produce results alone, together with the followers they contribute to the well-being of the organization. A range of practitioner research articles and published empirical research articles were reviewed to highlight narcissism among toxic leaders and elaborate on the destructive role of followers who reinforce toxic leadership through support. The analysis shows that while leaders and followers as colluders can cause harm to organizational outcomes, the extent of the harm can be largely influenced by the nature of the narcissist traits commonly endorsed by both. The paper highlights an overall framework that may help to identify the major considerations needed to mitigate the harmful effects of the narcissist leader/ follower relationship on positive organisational outcomes. Further, the paper suggests examining the relational aspects of leaders and followers as colluders, especially by looking at the impact of various narcissist traits that potentially strengthen the toxic relationship between the leader and follower. Finally, it is recommended that the proposed guidelines be tested in an empirical paper to measure their effectiveness.

Keywords: *Nexus, leadership, leaders, followers*

1. Introduction

Considerable research has been conducted on the construct of narcissism. The vast majority of research in social/personality psychology uses various forms of personality to assess the narcissist construct. Various accounts of narcissism draw attention to entitlement, arrogance, exhibitionism and self-absorption (Ackerman et al., 2010). However, while everyone needs to be a narcissist to some extent to satisfy their needs during normal development, destructive narcissism based on grandiosity, self-deception and reactiveness invariably produces negative outcomes (Reed, 2004). This is supported by Kernberg (1998) and Rosenthal (2005) who both argued that destructive narcissists exhibit abnormal substructures, self-esteem, exploitiveness and instability. From a leadership perspective, narcissism can become destructive if it manifests through over ambition and superiority at the expense of organizational success. Traditionally, research has highlighted the destructive effect of bad leadership on organizational performance (Kelley, 1992; Kusy & Holloway, 2009; Lipman-Blumen, 2005; Padilla, Hogan & Kaiser, 2007). Additionally, escalation in cases of dark leadership associated with narcissism has drawn the attention of researchers as such leadership has the potential to generate a myriad of dysfunctional ties within the organization (Goldman, 2006). However, a fundamental turning point is when both narcissist leaders and followers collude to the

detriment of the organization. If leaders with high levels of entitlement and exploitiveness display a lack of concern for those being led (Brown, Budzek and Tamorski, 2009) and followers with higher levels of entitlement and exploitiveness engage.

In a higher frequency of negative behavioral interactions with such leaders (Ackerman et al., 2010), then it is important to focus on the influence of such a toxic relationship on organizational performance. This paper examines the toxic leader-follower relationship, by focusing on the negative outcomes associated with such a relationship, more especially if it is reinforced by mutual dark traits. Generally, leaders are seen as drivers of influence, motivation and persuasion, while followers are dependent on these drivers provided by leaders to achieve organizational goals. Such leaders can be pathological or non- pathological leaders, the former being abnormal, deep-end dysfunctional narcissism and the latter being considered normal and related to organizational success (Furnham, 2014). It is argued that there is the potential that a negative leader who possess detrimental behaviors associated with narcissism, can be supported by followers who share similar dark personality traits, that cumulatively inject toxicity into organizations. This can contend from the point that followership is based on an inter-relationship between the leader, follower and the circumstances.

The leader and follower influence each other's behavior, while both play an integral role in achieving organizational outcomes. It could therefore be asserted that while bad leaders negatively influence organizational outcomes, bad followers are responsible for contributing to the negative organizational outcomes through their involvement in a toxic relationship. It is therefore critical to examine the factors driving such a relationship, and the impact thereof. The paucity of research on negative leadership and its influence on followership reinforcing negative leadership demonstrates the need for research on both constructs. As contended by Goldman (2006), narcissist leaders can be the driving engine producing high levels of performance, but it is the degree of narcissism that moves closer to dark leadership that is destructive in its intentionality. This can be accentuated by dark leadership being systematically supported by followers who share the same narcissist traits that cumulatively violates the legitimate interest of the organisation by undermining the organisation's goals, tasks, resources, and effectiveness (Einarsen, Aasland, & Skogstad, 2007). The outcome of the paper is important to help organizations to circumvent the destructive nature of not only toxic leaders, but also toxic followers.

2. Methodology

The paper adopted an exploratory research design approach that analysed existing research on leadership and narcissism. The paper qualitatively examined the multiplicity of dimensions influencing the toxic leader-follower relationship and the effects of such a relationship on organizational performance.

3. Narcissistic Leaders and Followers

Rosenthal and Pittinsky (2006) described narcissism as a personality trait illustrating self-absorption, selfishness, entitlement, grandiosity, arrogance and low self-esteem. These personality traits are prevalent among many leaders, who are generally motivated by self-interest, rather than organizational needs. Narcissism becomes a destructive trait when it is complemented with a selfish, personal agenda that leads to destructive organizational outcomes (Maccoby 2000). Narcissism is closely linked to instability, entitlement, grandiosity, arrogance and dominance (Rosenthal & Pittinsky. 2006). Several authors (Yukl, 2013; Craig & Kaiser, 2012; Kusy & Halloway, 2009; Rosenthal & Pittinsky. 2006) associate narcissism with destructive leadership. Padilla et al. (2007) assert that exploitative relationships, demand for unconditional obedience, abuse of power to serve personal needs and failure to test their judgement because of grandiosity results in narcissist leaders defying organizational goals. Research studies include narcissism as a dimension of toxic leadership (Kellerman, 2008; Reed, 2004; Schmidt, 2008). Various researchers have described narcissist leaders in similar ways.

A toxic leader is viewed as someone with a narcissistic mentality, underpinned by self-absorption, deceit, lack of concern for the well-being of subordinates and intimidation (Kellerman, 2008; Reed, 2004). Foster, Shiverdecker and Turner (2016) identified 7 sub-traits of narcissism: authority, self-sufficiency, superiority, vanity, exhibitionism, entitlement, exploitiveness. While there is an exhaustive set of narcissistic traits,

overall, narcissism can perpetuate the self-interests of followers who share similar exhibits as toxic leaders and have a destructive effect on organizational success (Lipman-Blumen, 2005). Through the use of intentional and destructive means, narcissist leaders willingly make decisions that generate personal benefit at the expense of the organization. Follower behavior can range on a continuum from doing absolutely nothing to being deeply involved. Such behaviours can be influenced by various factors, one of which can be the nature of the relationship between the leader and follower.

Followers as active participants with their own goals and motives can be influenced by a leader into participating in individual or group efforts toward organizational goals in a given situation (Wortman, 1982). Within this relationship, the extent to which the follower allows toxicity to be an influence is an important consideration. Allowing the prevalence of toxicity makes the follower a participant in a toxic relationship that favours the narcissist actions of the leader. This is corroborated by Kellerman's (2008) assertion that followers follow leaders because it is in their self-interest to do so. It can therefore be argued that the actions of bad followers are the result of their needs being fulfilled, further fueling destructive leadership. As active agents in toxic leadership, both followers and leaders exert influence in the toxic triangle which comprises the behavior of the leader; the susceptible and colluding follower and the environment (Padilla et al., 2007). It can therefore be contended that the common behaviors exhibited by destructive leaders such as harassment, degrading employees and physical aggression are generally absent in this toxic triangle, because of mutual collusion. Followership literature has been categorized by Uhl-Bien, Riggio, Lowe and Carsten (2014) as follows: relational view: followers engage with leaders in a mutual influence process, follower-centric: followers construct leaders and leadership, leader-centric: followers as recipients or moderators of leader influence in producing outcomes, constructionist followership.

Followers as co-creators with leaders of leadership, and role-based followership: leader as recipient or moderator of follower influence in producing outcomes. It can be posited that the relational view, which can be aligned with the leader-member exchange theory, is an important aspect of leadership studies, as effective followership influences effective leadership. In this regard, Kelley (1992) claimed that organizational success is directly attributable to effective followership, therefore implying that followers have the power to influence leadership. Effective followers are committed to an organizational purpose, honesty and credibility. Conversely, it can be argued that narcissist followers in a toxic leadership context do not exhibit these qualities, as they are dependent on the high exchange relationship to support the self-interest of themselves and their leaders. While Leela, Mehta and Jambhulkar (2013, p. 360) assert that destructive leaders "maintain negative interaction with followers to control, exploit their loyalty and suppress them for attainment of their selfish agendas leading to organisational decline", on the contrary it can be contended that leaders and followers who collude in a toxic relationship will generally experience positive interaction. In this instance, it can be argued that narcissist followers engage in deviant and susceptible behavior, not necessarily because of repeated abuse, but rather due to the toxic relationship they enjoy with the destructive leader.

Narcissist Followers as Colluders: Followers can be conformers or colluders, where each follower group has the potential to participate in bad followership and contribute to toxic leadership. Conformists, seen as the "yes-people," are dependent on the leader for direction, thinking, and vision. Being passive, they are less likely to challenge the leader (Kellerman, 2008). While both conformers and colluders are bad followers, colluders can be seen as more destructive due to their narcissist tendencies. Toxic leadership is an ideal opportunity for colluders to advance their personal agendas, since there is an alignment of narcissist exhibits between leader and follower. By sharing the world views of the leaders, colluders actively participate in destructive leadership to pursue their ambitions (Padilla, Hogan & Kaiser, 2007). Rather than disapprove of a destructive leader, colluders are considered as opportunists who use the leader/ follower relationship to obtain personal benefits.

Henderson (2015) categorized colluder types as status-driven, Machiavellian, and risk-intensive. The research study by Henderson (2015) revealed that status driven colluders would do anything to achieve their goals of power and status, by willingly engaging in destructive behaviours. Machiavellian followership is characterized by manipulation, distrust of others and withholding negative personal information. Henderson (2015) asserts that while Machiavellian colluders would lie and steal to achieve their goals, risk-intensive colluders use risky destructive means like breaking the rules to achieve their goals. In all three types of

colluders identified by Henderson (2015), colluders can be regarded as more destructive than conformers as they fuel the destructive values and motives of a toxic leader, which is aligned to narcissist manifestations. In this case, the readiness of followers as colluders corresponds with the relationship, task and supportive behavior of destructive leaders.

Narcissist Leaders and Colluders in a Toxic Leadership Relationship: Followers, both conformers and colluders, provide the consensus for the survival of leadership in any organization. While conformers attempt to mitigate the consequences of being disobedient, colluders seek personal gain by associating with destructive leaders. Padilla et al. (2007) contend that conformers are vulnerable because of negative self-perceptions, while colluders share the same destructive, narcissist goals. The confluence between colluders and leaders is grounded in a toxic relationship. A conducive environment, wherein the leader and followers share homogenous narcissist motives, perpetuates the survival of leaders in a toxic environment. Followers, who align themselves with destructive leaders to fulfil their self-interests, contribute to destructive leadership. Both parties show little or no concern for the organization, since they are propelled by entitlement and self-absorption. Herein, colluders who willingly assist in implementing the vision of destructive leaders, follow coercive policies so long as their worldviews and ambitions are advanced as evidenced by ambitious staff in Hitler's regime and Enron (Million, 1996). While opportunities for constructive leadership exist in every organization, leaders who display destructive traits associated with self-fulfilling agendas ultimately contribute to organisational destruction. Destructive leadership can generate ineffectiveness and unethical behaviour. In support, Lipman-Blumen, (2005) asserts that such destructive leaders are toxic when their dysfunctional personal characteristics cause harm to their constituents. Colluders, who share the same grandiose needs as their leader, may be seen as a hero, while others may view such leaders as toxic.

Craig and Kaiser, (2012) argued that destructive leadership which leans towards toxic leadership violated the interests of the organization. Kellerman (2004), asserted that negative leadership may fail to bring about change and unable to differentiate between different levels of ethics. Such destructive leadership is toxic, as it is counterproductive to organizational well-being. The study by Kusy and Holloway (2009) investigated the widespread prevalence of toxic leadership, highlighting the influential relationship between leader and follower in high exchange in-group interactions. This is illustrated by the Leader-Member Exchange theory, which categorizes followers into two categories: in- group and out-group followers. According to Yukl (2013), high-exchange, in-group followers tend to have more responsibilities, stronger commitment and tend to do extra things for the leader. The leader, in viewing the follower as dependable, establishes a high exchange relationship with the follower based on greater responsibility, authority, and occupational rewards being granted to the follower (Pelletier, 2012). In exchange, the follower becomes a colluder within the high exchange group, who commits to advancing the world view of the leader. The study by Pelletier, (2012) revealed that group members did not perceive toxicity in their leaders because of their favored status and possibly being blinded because of feelings of loyalty, trust and reciprocity.

The literature points to destructive leadership undermining the initiative, will and potential of followers, ultimately destroying morale (Bell, 2017; Cheang & Appelbaum, 2015; Edwards, Schedlitzki, Ward & Wood, 2015). However, when followers collude then this may not merge. The study by Reed (2004) noted that followers can identify toxic leaders, who have the potential to influence follower behavior. However, it can be argued that the converse is also possible, whereby the exhibition of dysfunctional personality characteristics by toxic leaders can influence followers to exhibit the same, thereby cumulatively contributing to organizational harm. Contrary to leaders helping followers to transcend their self-interest for the benefit of organizational success, toxic leaders and followers who collude may fuel each other's self-interests. Since destructive leadership includes behaviours directed towards the organization and behaviours directed towards subordinates, it can therefore be asserted that narcissist followers and leaders in a toxic relationship not only undermine organizational effectiveness and goals, but also harm the well-being of those who do not conformers or collude. Similarity, in- beliefs between colluders and leaders encourages colluders to commit to a common cause. While Lipman-Blumen (2005) highlighted psychological needs, unfulfilled existential needs, rapid change and contextual factors as reasons for following a toxic leader, the possibility of both leader and follower being narcissists requires further consideration.

In particular, narcissistic characteristics that reflect a drive to elevate the self, while harming organizational and other individual interests can be considered dark (Harms & Spain, 2014). Additionally, Jones and Figueredo (2011) argue that while well-meaning lies is a part of everyday life and good relationships, the dark side of personality emerges when callousness, dishonesty, and manipulation and lack of empathy all come together. For example, leaders like Dennis Koslowski, Hitler, Stalin and Charles Keating, were destructive even though they brought some value to their constituents (Hogan and Kaiser, 2007). The seven courages of followership (responsibility, moral action, speak to hierarchy, listen to followers, serve, participate in transformation, challenge) described by Chaleff (2009) can be perceived as traits of effective followers which are congruent with serving an organizational purpose. Figure 1 highlights the nature of the toxic relationship between leaders and colluders, underpinned by narcissistic manifestations.

Figure1: Progression toward Toxic Leadership
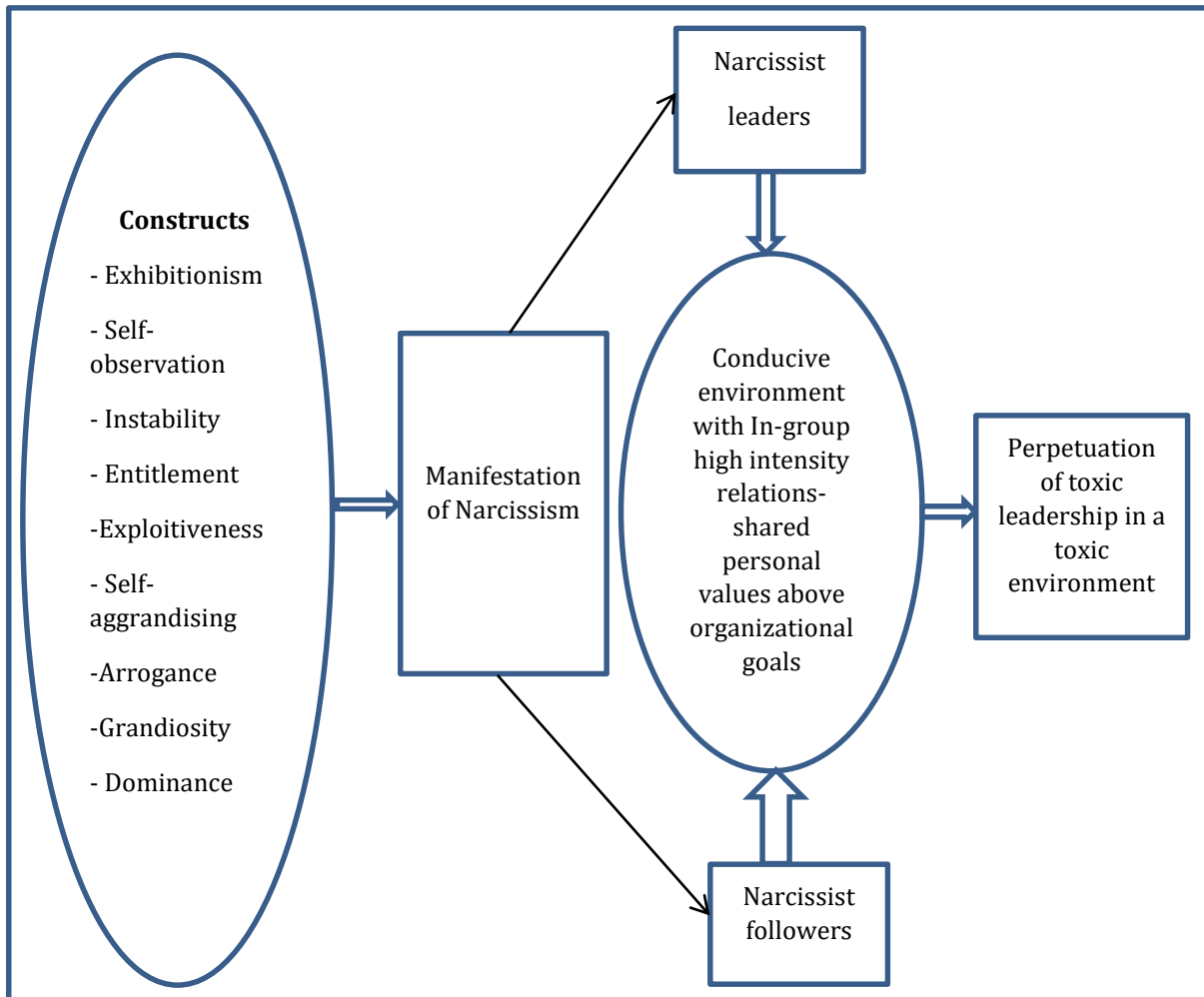
Source: Self-generated by researcher

Schmidt (2008, p.57) in describing toxic leaders as "narcissistic, self-promoters who engage in an unpredictable pattern of abusive and authoritarian supervision", captured five dimensions describing a toxic leader- narcissism, self- promotion, abusive supervision, unpredictability and authoritarian leadership. Narcissism, being one of the causes of toxic leadership, is detrimental to organizational culture. Rosenthal and Pittinsky (2006, p. 617) claim that negative leaders exhibit the narcissistic personality trait that encompasses "grandiosity, arrogance, self-absorption, entitlement, fragile self-esteem, and hostility". These drivers can impact followers, who through their dependence, invariably become followers of toxicity, especially in conducive environments. Lipman-Blumen (2005) described toxic leaders as intentionally harming others to

enhance the self. In connecting intentional harm to destructive behaviour and toxic leadership, Lipman-Blumen (2005 as cited in Heppel, 2011) identified the following dark traits of destructive leadership.

A tendency towards recklessness and a disregard for the costs of their actions to others as well as to themselves a form of cowardice, that leads them to shrink from the difficult choice. An enormous ego that blinds leaders to the shortcomings of their own character thus limiting their capacity for self-renewal an arrogance that prevents them from acknowledging their mistakes and results in the apportioning of blame upon others; an amorality that makes it virtually impossible for them to identify right from wrong A lack of integrity that marks the leader as cynical, corrupt, hypocritical or untrustworthy; An insatiable ambition that prompts leaders to put their own desire for power, glory and fortune above their followers' well-being. Additionally, Padilla et al. (2007) identified the following important elements of destructive leadership: there are bad and good results; based on selfish needs; the process involves manipulation and coercion; compromise of quality of life of constituents; and destructive organizational outcomes are the result of colluders, conformers and Conducive environments.

In drawing attention to the relationship between leaders and followers, Lipman-Blumen (2005) argues that the relationship between leaders and followers is of considerable importance, since toxic leadership be aided by followers who actively respond to aid destructive leadership because of common narcissist exhibits. While destructive leadership leans towards a generally selfish orientation, followers who collude with destructive leaders can be described as destructive followers. This is different from destructive leadership based on incompetence, as destructive leadership underpinned by narcissism is driven by self-serving goals. This is consistent with the argument of Leela, Mehta and Jambhulkar (2013), that self- absorbed followers believe that the strength of destructive leaders will generate tangible benefits for both if they help in actualizing the goals of the leader. While there is extant literature on the potential negative impact of narcissism as a toxic leadership dimension on followers (Cheang & Appelbaum, 2015; Brown, Budzek & Tamborski, 2009; Erickson et al., 2015; Schmidt, 2008; Foster, Shiverdecker & Turner, 2016, Bell, 2017)), there is limited literature on the correlation between potential negative impact of narcissist followers and leaders in a toxic leadership relationship. Further, there is limited research regarding the relationship between leaders and followers, using the different constructs of narcissism that reinforces organizational harm.

According to Yukl (2013), in high exchange relationships between leaders and followers, followers are involved in an in-group two-way relationship with the leader. The followers (colluders) interaction is based on high levels of respect, trust and obligation towards the leader. In researching the extent to which the relationship between followers and leaders influences the decision of followers to challenge toxic leaders, Pelletier (2012) noted that the follower had to critically analyse the behavior of the leader, highlighting that followers with favoured status had lesser intent to report the leader. Evidence of toxic leadership may be prevalent, but followers do not challenge such toxicity because of the high exchange relationship between the leader and follower. The study by Pelletier (2012) found that in-group followers were less likely to see the leader as toxic. Based on the high degree of support given to the leader and the lack of willingness to challenge a leader, it can be argued that in an in-group relationship demonstrating a willingness to support toxic leadership, followers can be described as perpetuators of such toxicity. Being close to leaders who share similar interests, provides the opportune breeding ground for bad followership and destructive leadership to flourish. This is supported by Reicher, Haslam and Smith (2012) who claim that active followership is not based on mere obedience or thoughtlessness, but rather identification with the leader.

This is supported by Kelley (1992) who asserts that followers are directly responsible for the organizational outcome in most cases. As such, courageous followers do not accept the actions of leaders that negatively impact them. By not embracing narcissist actions of leaders they therefore cannot be described as narcissist followers. This is corroborated by Padilla et al. (2007) who assert that bad followership allows bad leadership, describing such followers as colluders who use toxic leadership to promote themselves. Padilla et al. (2007) identified four environmental factors that reinforce destructive leadership: leaders are given more authority in unstable environments which require quick, centralized decision making e.g.: President George Bush's use of terrorist policies because of the fear of death); perceptions of threat or an external enemy increases the willingness to accept assertive leadership (IBM referred to as Big Brother by Apple's Steve Jobs); dark leaders thrive in cultures that prefer to avoid uncertainty, endorse collective loyalty and support

high- power distance (e.g.: Hitler's dictatorship based on Aryan superiority); and centralized governance with independent authority that lacks a system of checks and balances allows abusive power to flourish (e.g.: the abuse by Enron top management at the height of its success).

4. Contributors to the Toxic Narcissist Leader-Follower Relationship

In a positive leadership context, leaders can enhance organizational and follower performance by perpetuating an inspiring and intellectually stimulating vision to their followers and by establishing individualized relationships. In contrast, in a destructive leadership context, leaders can attract narcissist followers and establish individualized relationships which prevent organizations from achieving their goals. Generally, toxic leaders who are driven by power-oriented leadership are commanding, egoistic and authoritarian. However, it can be argued, that followers as colluders, who identify with and share the same personal goals as a toxic leader may support such leaders (Karakitapoğ˘lu-Aygu & Gumusluoglu, 2012). In this instance, subordinates who model the destructive behavior of leaders, also focus on individual interests, rather than organizational goals. These colluders enable and sustain toxic leaders, in an environment that generally tolerates them (Lipman-Blumen, 2005). Considering the complexities associated with toxic leadership, a range of factors can contribute to the toxic narcissist leader-follower relationship within any organization.

Firstly, followers may find that their goals cannot be accomplished through legitimate pathways. By supporting a toxic leader to advance his personal goals, followers are perceived favourably by their leaders. This high-intensity leader-follower exchange creates a conducive environment for followers to achieve their goals by playing politics (Erickson, Shaw, Murray & Branch, 2015). Playing politics may include reinforcing leader initiatives that show evidence of the leader achieving bottom-line results and supporting every source of information that instils perceptions of excellent performance. Such follower conduct thwarts potential exposure of otherwise bad leadership conduct, in the interest of maintaining a leader-follower exchange that advances the goals of both parties. Additionally, there could be a lack of will to circumvent bad leadership, because organization goals relating to performance is being achieved. This creates a fertile breeding environment for toxic leadership to thrive. The work environment like sales and science potentially supports narcissist qualities to thrive. Qualities like self-absorption and charisma augur well for narcissists in these work contexts. The convergence of the goals of the leader and followers sows the seeds for toxic relationships.

Rosenthal and Pittinsky (2006) support this in their claim that narcissist leaders and followers complement each other, where the leaders are always looking for admiration from followers who relate to power and prestige. Of particular interest is how dissatisfied staff contribute to the continuation of toxic relationships. In this instance, the study by Reed (2004) showed that while employees were dissatisfied with the toxic triangle, they were not inclined to leave their jobs because of their experiences, suggesting years of good leadership experiences and personal gratification with their positions as possible reasons for retention. This is a potential breeding ground for toxicity to flourish. Further, the lack of an ethical culture, underpinned by minimal or non-existent training in ethical conduct and reinforced by the absence of an organizational code of conduct can inculcate a culture of merely "doing things right". This promotes non-accountability by leaders and followers. This also contributes to non-conformers feeling powerless to take any action against toxic leaders and followers. Also, the toxic relationship is often allowed to fester because of weak mechanisms that do not support exposure. For example, the absence of a whistleblower policy may render it untenable to blow the whistle because of fear of retaliation by non-conformers. Another contributor to consider is limited communication channels that allow issues to be raised. In the absence of communication channels like feedback surveys and suggestion boxes, lack of awareness sows the seed for growth in the high-intensity leader-follower relationship.

Another systemic issue could be high turnover by non-conformers. This places constraints on exposing the toxic relationship, as new employees will generally not retaliate immediately or may be potential colluders as well. Also, through the use of their power, toxic leaders may prevent non- conformers from challenging them. This may result in such followers ignoring not only bad leaders, but also ignoring the bad leader-follower relationship. The relationship itself can become so powerfully entrenched, that non-conformers to the line

just to secure continued employment. Organizations can also become an incubator of toxic relationships because of an organizational culture based on high levels of internal competition; weak practices and policies; and toleration of blaming others (Mehta & Maheshwari, 2014). Kusy and Holloway (2009) contend that a toxic system allows toxic relationships to thrive. When colluders protect toxic leaders, then toxicity becomes part of the organizational culture. An organizational culture that avoids negative publicity 'invariably restraints any attempts to expose destructive leadership, underpinned by bad, colluding followership.

Effects of a Toxic Leader-Follower Relationship: There is a paucity of literature on the effects of the toxic relationship on individuals and the organization. A toxic culture invariably permeates an organization; once toxic relationships are thriving. Such a climate may possibly achieve short-term organizational goals. However, goals based on self-interest do not serve organizational goals in the long term. Research has shown significant relationships between destructive, toxic leadership and counterproductive work (Mullins, 2015); lower employee psychological well-being (Bell, 2017); work-family conflict (Erickson et al., 2015); and an unpleasant working environment (Jones & Figueredo, 2013). Generally, employees who do not want to be conformers or colluders, or those who feel compelled to conform, may experience high levels of job dissatisfaction, negative values and hopelessness. This can lead to lower levels of productivity, a tarnished view of the organization and resignations. While those in the toxic relationship may be content with the existing environment, those outside the relationship may not be developed to their full competency levels because of their disenchantment with toxic leaders who run organisations to the ground. They may be forced to remain in the organization because of no alternate employment opportunities. Working under such conditions mitigates cohesive teamwork that provides the springboard for individual and organizational stability.

In essence, if there are no active processes and procedures in place to eradicate toxic leader-follower relationships in an organization, such toxicity can spread like cancer, to the detriment of organizational longevity. This allows toxic leaders, because of their vulnerability and fear of threats to their power and control, to focus all their energy on acquiring power and authority. Generally, in a toxic environment, output based on merit is sacrificed, since more attention is placed on self-absorbed goals of the leader and followers. This practice can disillusion top performers who are outside the toxic relationship, possibly resulting in higher employee turnover (Mehta & Maheshwari, 2014). On the other hand, because of job security, employees who are forced to remain may display lower levels of commitment, loyalty and job satisfaction. In addition, external awareness of toxicity within the organization may result in perspective, ethical employees being discouraged to seek employment in the organization.

5. Conclusion

Research in recent years has shown significant interest in toxic leadership. Generally, literature argues that destructive leadership, underpinned by personal motives overriding organizational goals, ultimately leads to the decline of the organization. The paper highlighted that susceptible, colluding followers of destructive leadership create a conducive, environment for continued toxic leadership. The paper established that followers and leaders both influence organizational outcomes. In doing so, toxic leadership provides the ideal breeding ground for toxic followers to advance their own agendas. Therefore, it is recommended that toxic followers, as colluders, should also be held responsible for poor organizational performance. This will help to counter the effect of a toxic relationship. Since current literature does not answer the question relating to the extent to which followers, as narcissists, may be one of the influential antecedents of narcissistic leadership, thereby perpetuating toxic leadership, there is a need for more research relating to narcissism in leaders and how followers who exhibit similar traits mutually perpetuate narcissist, toxic behaviour.

This will make a significant contribution to broadening research into the leader-follower relationship and the impact of this relationship on toxic leadership. More robust research on the toxic relationship is pivot for organizations affected by dark leadership. Further, with new theoretical models on the antecedents of this relationship, and perspectives from different paradigms, consideration can be given to curbing narcissist following and ultimate narcissist leadership. Any attempt to restrain the destructive and harmful effects of toxic leadership in any organization requires an interrogation of the leader-follower relationship. This can be underpinned by organizational practices and policies that prevent the negative consequences of not only

toxic leaders, but also toxic leader-follower relationships that ultimately harm organizational culture. Finally, when destructive leaders generate negative outcomes, then bad followers must share the responsibility for producing negative outcomes as leaders alone do not produce organizational results.

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