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# Effective Processes for Dealing With Destructive Managers

Mary Featherston  
*St. Catherine University*

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**Effective Processes for Dealing With Destructive Managers**

by  
**Mary Featherston**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Organizational Leadership at  
St. Catherine University  
St. Paul, Minnesota**

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**Research Advisor:  
Martha Hardesty, PhD**

**Research Reading Committee  
Debra Magnuson  
Jolynn Nelson**

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**Signature of Advisor**

**Martha E. Hardesty, Ph.D.**

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**Date**

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# Leadership Thesis

Title page	1
Approval/Signature Page	1
Acknowledgements	2
Table of Contents	3
List of Tables and Figures	4
Abstract	5
Chapter 1: Introduction	6
Chapter 2: Analysis of Conceptual Context	9
Chapter 3: Methodology	23
Chapter 4: Presentation of Results and Discussion	28
Chapter 5: Summary, Recommendations, and Conclusions	52
References	59
Appendices: A IRB Application	61
B Research Instrument	68
C Interview Protocol	72
D Sample Consent Form	74

## **List of Tables and Figures**

Figure 1: Categorization of Managerial Behavior, from Einarsen, et. al	11
Figure 2: Categorization of Destructive Leader Behaviors, from Thoroughgood, et. al	12
Figure 3: Balancing Responsibilities to Stakeholders, Nelson & Featherston	21
Figure 4: Time to Recognition of Destructive Managerial Behavior	30
Figure 5: Balancing Responsibilities to Stakeholders, Nelson & Featherston	56
Figure 6: Achieving Balance	57

## **Abstract**

Companies and organizations often struggle with employees who are hired for management positions but lack interpersonal skills and whose behavior is volatile, belittling, and destructive toward their subordinates, peers, and sometimes the organization itself. The outcomes of such behavior are damaged corporate cultures and employees who work in fear and become disengaged and unproductive, and the costs associated with dealing with these outcomes are both real and substantial.

This research shows that organizations are generally ill-prepared to address destructive managerial behavior, and even those who have processes in place often falter in the execution. It is suggested that the act of developing corporate guidelines for dealing with destructive managerial behavior in advance will prepare the organization to minimize the damage that will be done to the company and its employees and permit priorities to be set based on company values.

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

In an ideal world, companies would be able to rely on all of their employees to behave professionally, act in the best interests of the company, and interact with their colleagues and subordinates in a collaborative and considerate way. Unfortunately, there are people who can't or won't, and their unprofessional, inconsiderate, and even callous behavior can damage the work environment, the corporate culture, and even the health and careers of those around them. When people like this move into management positions, the impact is even greater, and more destructive.

Experience suggests that companies often hire managers for subject-matter expertise and disregard behavioral or interpersonal competencies. Others are aware of the importance of professional behavior but may not observe any signals during the interview process – after all, people in interviews are on their best behavior – and once hired, managers and directors have considerably less oversight, leaving them free to behave as they will. One way or another, people do end up in positions of authority and responsibility whose behavior is based in self-absorption and whose interactions with others are marked by condescension, insults, and drama.

The impact of such destructive behavior by management is severe, both on other employees in the organization, and on the organization itself. As an example, consider a company that hires a new director whose technical qualifications were stellar and critical to the company's success. What might happen when within a few months it becomes clear that the new director couldn't – or wouldn't – cooperate with others; those who went along with his or her proposals were, however temporarily, in good graces and those who did not were berated and belittled in meetings. Such managers often micromanage employees, and do not permit them to

participate in group decisions in their teams, which limits their effectiveness. Further, such a person's behavior toward employees who report to others is often scornful and dismissive. Employees are forced to deal with exhibitions of bad temper, denigration of themselves or their colleagues, and public belittling and insults. In the end, many employees will simply begin to work on their resumes and apply for other jobs – and some people will actually leave.

Then what?

What can and should companies do when they find that their most recent new hire is making others miserable, destroying collaboration and teamwork, driving other employees to leave, and even affecting the business performance of the company? Many companies find themselves in this situation but few have guidelines for dealing with them. Many companies don't include interpersonal competencies in the performance evaluation, and those who do may be too slow to act because employees are afraid to talk about the destructive manager, and upper management will often believe that the new manager should be given an opportunity to fit in and become effective. The ability to evaluate the impact of destructive managerial behavior or bullying, weigh the impacts and outcomes, and balance the responsibility that the company has toward its new employee with its responsibilities to its other employees and to the organization itself – and the business – is something that is not often developed and implemented in advance.

In this study I investigated what companies do in such situations and evaluated the efficacy of the actions taken, and from the results and a review of current literature and other research, have developed a framework that will allow companies to evaluate their options when dealing with destructive managers, while taking into account their own unique culture and individual situations. There is no one solution that works for everyone, but the insight provided by the respondents to this study suggests a framework of concerns that should be considered



when companies and managers find themselves dealing with interpersonally destructive behavior. This framework provides structure around the ethics of the situation, a chance to reflect on the individual organization's unique culture and work environment, and the interlocking web of responsibilities that the company has to its managers, its employees and its business. Any organization can find itself with toxic individuals in positions of responsibility. It is far from unusual and any organization that prepares to deal with destructive behavior before it happens will act more effectively when it does occur.

The development of a framework to evaluate destructive behavior must include an evaluation of the ethical issues faced by company management: What responsibilities does the company have to its new manager? What responsibilities does the company have to its other employees? And what responsibilities does the company have to its own business, its culture, and its ability to function? How can we scrutinize these conflicting responsibilities through an ethical lens and arrive at a way to evaluate the conflicts that inevitably arrive when a manager or senior employee's behavior is uncontrolled and destructive? Because these situations are far from unusual, the ability to weigh the responsibilities to the organization's stakeholders and the impact on the business itself is critical to resolving the problem. A company that fails to take this web of responsibilities into account cannot be said to be leading in an ethical or effective way – and in the absence of ethical and effective leadership, nor are its managers are likely to endure as leaders.

## **Chapter 2: Analysis of the Conceptual Context**

### Defining “Destructive Managerial Behavior”

A study of destructive managerial behavior must start by defining “destructive” or “toxic” managerial behavior. There is significant literature available about toxic managerial behavior. Kellerman (2004) described the behaviors that are symptomatic of bad leadership, and categorized those that she called “bad leaders” into types, though Shaw, Erickson and Harvey (2011) noted that Kellerman’s categories were based on case studies and anecdotes and had no empirical basis. Shaw, Erickson and Harvey did research bad leadership and developed a typology based on their data, but again did not present a working definition that accurately describes destructive managerial behavior. More helpful is the work of Einarsen, Aasland, and Skogstad (2007), who defined destructive managerial behavior as “the systematic and repeated behavior by a leader, supervisor or manager that violates the legitimate interest of the organization by undermining and/or sabotaging the organization’s goals, tasks, resources, and effectiveness and/or the motivation, well-being or job satisfaction of his/her subordinates.” (p. 208) As a working definition, this is functional and provides a starting point.

### The Causes and Categorization of Destructive Managerial Behavior

Rieger (2011) discusses the root causes of destructive managerial behavior in some detail, and sees the behavior inherent in parochialism, territorialism, and empire building as the root of much destructive managerial behavior. Goldman (2009) focuses primarily on psychological causes and discusses treatment options, as does Lubit (2002). Lubit discusses the impact of managers with narcissistic personality disorder and brings clarity to the causes of a

number of behaviors that can be observed when dealing with destructive managers. Lubit described destructive narcissistic behavior as having three defining characteristics: “(1) grandiosity (inflated sense of self-importance, arrogance, preoccupation with power and wealth, excessive seeking of admiration), (2) a sense that they are entitled to have whatever they want, including a willingness to exploit others to get it, and (3) lack of concern for and devaluation of others.” While it is unlikely that most people identified as toxic managers will be formally diagnosed, these characteristics are a common thread throughout both the literature and my research results.

Caponecchia and Wyatt (2011) regard destructive workplace behaviors as being caused primarily by the workplace culture that permits it to happen rather than as the result of an individual’s tendency to bad behavior. It is undeniable that some corporate cultures permit destructive behaviors, or permit more of them to occur, and some organizations clearly do better than others in dealing with toxic behavior, but it seems counterproductive to regard the corporate culture as the primary problem – and indeed even Caponecchia and Wyatt later make it clear that the perpetrator is to be given an opportunity to correct the behavior, but not unlimited chances.

Most of the other work that has been done discusses categorization of destructive or toxic managerial behavior. Kellerman (2004) proposes that bad or destructive managers can be categorized as incompetent, rigid, intemperate, callous, corrupt, insular or evil, and she does note that an individual’s behavior can fit into more than one of these categories. Categorizing bad leaders as Kellerman does may be beneficial for one practical reason: Companies may wish to determine whether a destructive manager’s behavior is simply rigid or intemperate since those things may be modifiable behaviors, whereas corrupt behaviors or those based in simple evil are most likely not. This would assist the organization in deciding what to do to address the

behaviors. Einarsen, Aasland, and Skogstad (2007) propose a model that measures managers' behavioral competence on two dimensions – whether their behavior is supportive or unsupportive of the goals of the organization, and whether their behavior is supportive or unsupportive of their subordinates. The intersection of these two tendencies results in four categories in which managerial behavior can be placed:

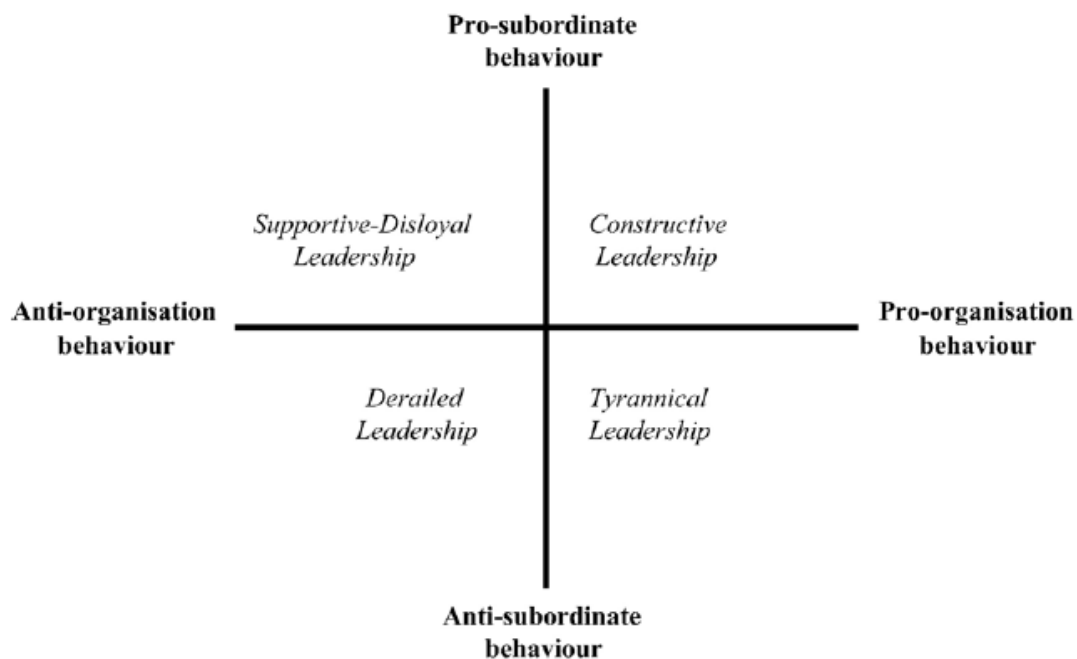


Figure 1, Einarsen, et al

Thoroughgood, Tate, Sawyer and Jacobs (2012) take a similar approach in that they focus on “acts that most would perceive as harmful and deviant toward followers and/or the organization” (p. 231). They also make the point that destructive leader behavior should be evaluated based on its inherent nature rather than based on outcomes. A manager could use threats to elicit heightened performance from a subordinate, and the subordinate may in fact respond by working harder and doing better. But threats cannot be regarded as positive leadership. The focus of the

work done by Thoroughgood, et al was to survey work that has been done to date in the area of destructive leadership behaviors, categorize them in an effort to correlate the disparate work done in the field – and thus arrive at a measure of destructive leadership behavior as a concept.

They categorized destructive leader behaviors as follows:

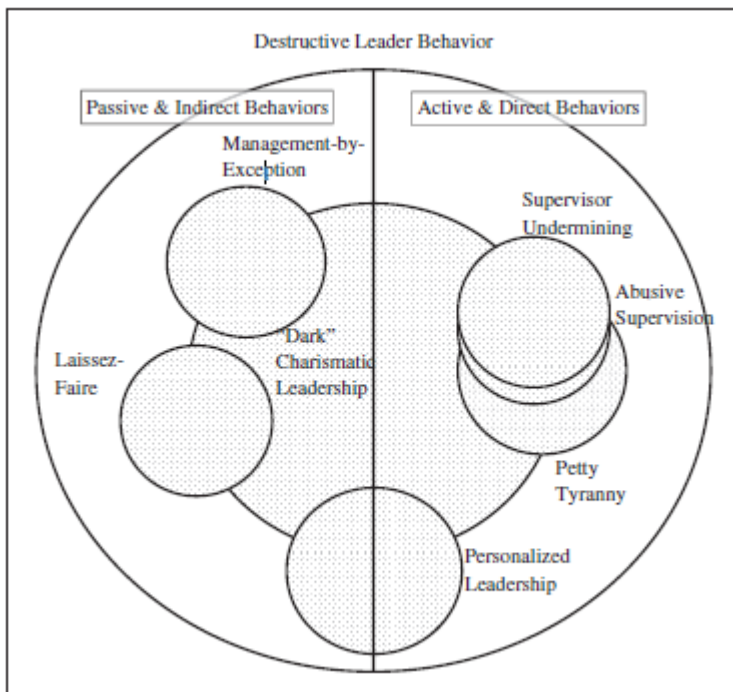


Figure 2, Thoroughgood et al, p. 232

The behaviors on the left side of the graphic are not truly destructive leadership but rather passivity or incompetence. The behaviors shown on the right are intentional behaviors that are fairly categorized as destructive leadership. This graphic is not intended to be exhaustive but rather to make two points: first, that the existing research has identified only a limited range of destructive leadership behaviors, and second, that there is considerable overlap between the types of behaviors identified as destructive managerial behaviors. Thoroughgood et al also noted that their own study brought to light some behaviors which were previously known but not often

included in research into destructive managerial behavior, such as sexual harassment, manipulative behaviors, and personal use of company property. This brings to light the importance of “conceptualizing DLB (destructive leadership behavior) as an inherently multidimensional construct” (Thoroughgood, et al, p. 247). This is a significant step in identifying behaviors as destructive leadership behavior.

### The Impacts of Toxic Managerial Behavior

Though the outcomes and impacts of destructive leader behavior are perhaps not of help in categorizing those behaviors, they are nonetheless of deep concern to organizations. There is considerable work that has been done on the impact of toxic managerial behavior on other employees – Namie and Namie (2011), and Pearson and Porath (2009) in particular discuss the impact on other employees and on the organization in considerable detail, as does Sutton (2007). Sutton discusses the outcomes of toxic managerial behavior, including the impact on other employees and the cost to the company of such behavior, going so far as proposing a template for calculating the cost of toxic behavior in the workplace. Among the effects on other employees that Sutton discusses are distraction from tasks, reduced psychological safety and the associated climate of fear, loss of motivation, stress-induced illness, and absenteeism. To this Namie and Namie add turnover – usually of the wrong people, as it is generally the higher performers who are driven away, simply because they’re able to get other work. Additionally, Namie and Namie note, toxic behavior exposes the organization to the risk of litigation and to increased disability costs. Pearson and Porath’s book presents a detailed list of the costs of toxic behavior, based on a study that they performed which showed, among other things:

- Fifty-three percent of employees surveyed lost work time worrying about the incident and future interactions with the offender.
- Twenty-eight percent lost work time trying to avoid the offender.
- Thirty-seven percent reported a weakened sense of commitment to their organizations.
- Twenty-two percent reduced their efforts at work.
- Ten percent decreased the amount of time they spent at work.
- Forty-six percent thought about changing their jobs – to get away from the offender.
- Twelve percent actually changed jobs

(Pearson and Porath, p. 31)

Sutton (2007) presents a way to quantify the costs of destructive behavior and calculated the cost of one toxic employee on his company to be \$160,000 per year. This included time spent by Human Resources, time spent by the toxic manager's manager, time spent by corporate executives, the cost of counsel, which comes up when termination is being considered, and the cost of recruitment and hiring to replace the people who quite to get away from the toxic manager. This is a significant cost to the organization. Sutton does also discuss working to identify these people and avoid hiring them, and later discussed identifying them and getting rid of them, but does not much address any mechanisms by which companies can weigh their ethical responsibilities and come to a conclusion about what to do, or even when in the process it's appropriate to act. Rieger (2011) discusses the culture of fear that arises around toxic managers and how to break through the fear and help employees deal with destructive workplace behavior.

In their book, Pearson and Porath (2009) discuss the costs and outcomes of bad behavior in some detail and have some suggestions for companies on how to deal with incivility. "Incivility" is their much more polite way of describing this behavior, but perhaps lets it off too lightly –

which was Sutton's point when he deliberately chose to call his book "The No Asshole Rule" and to refer to people who behave in toxic ways as assholes throughout the book. Pearson and Porath do list things that companies can do to reduce incivility in the workplace. These include:

- a zero-tolerance policy,
- an expectation that upper management will scrutinize their own behavior as well as that of others
- a focused effort to avoid hiring people who will be behavioral problems
- use of corporate training programs to teach desired behavioral competencies
- a commitment to listen to feedback and avoid discounting its importance
- a willingness to fire people who cannot or will not modify their behavior.

(Pearson and Porath, pp. 138 – 150)

Like Sutton, though, Pearson and Porath do not present a way to weigh the organization's responsibilities to the culture, to the teams, and to individuals.

#### What to do About Destructive Behavior

As mentioned above, Pearson and Porath's suggestions range from taking employee complaints seriously, avoiding making excuses for people, and being willing to fire people when it is the only way to eliminate the behavior. Johnson (2009) also discusses ways that companies can set the stage for expectations of collaborative and respectful workplace behavior with many of the same concepts – zero tolerance policies for anti-social actions and willingness to take action against the perpetrators, among others.

Namie and Namie (2011) go even farther, suggesting that to keep the workplace bully-free, it's necessary to measure behavioral competencies and incorporate these metrics into the performance evaluation system. This would require a policy stating that behavioral



competencies are a condition of employment, and would mean considerable work put into developing a performance evaluation system that measures them. Use of 360-degree appraisals and taking such feedback seriously would facilitate imposing real costs for such behavior, including impacts on pay raises and the availability of promotions and career growth. Note that while Namie and Namie use the term “bully” rather than “destructive managers” or even “assholes”, it is clear in their book that they are describing the same phenomenon.

Kusy and Holloway (2010) propose implementation of what they call “respectful engagement” in the organization. They break this down into strategies to be adopted by the organization as a whole – including a policy of respectful engagement and the adoption of corporate values which become core benchmarks for both performance evaluation and leadership development; by teams, which include civility values as part of the team’s norms, 360-degree team assessment, and identification of those who either protect those whose behavior is toxic or who act as buffers for them; and by individuals, which involves a performance evaluation which is 60% task-driven and 40% values-driven.

Performance assessment tools can include such behavioral competencies as initiative, collaboration, leadership and accountability, which were four that were used in one company’s appraisal system. As a second example, another company uses: thinks from the outside in; drives innovation and growth; develops, teaches, and engages others; makes courageous decisions; leads with energy, passion and urgency; and lives company values. However, inclusion of behavioral competencies in the performance appraisal system is only the first step. Second, and much more difficult, is to obtain honest feedback. Many people will hesitate to criticize co-workers, either because they wish to avoid “getting them in trouble” or because they prefer not to upset team dynamics if the source of the input is recognized. Others will fear to

report toxic behavior in management simply due to fear of reprisal from the toxic manager. Until honest feedback is obtained and acted on, the efficacy of using a performance evaluation system as a way of controlling destructive behavior is limited.

Goldman (2009) took a different approach, suggesting that if the offensive employee is valuable enough to salvage, that companies should hire psychologists who could treat the toxic employee with the goal of changing the behavior. This would involve a decision on the organization's part that the individual in question is irreplaceable, or at least important enough to the organization that the organization can and should involve itself in requiring psychological treatment for the employee.

Another factor that will be important to consider is setting out expectations clearly from the time a new employee is hired. Some companies have formal programs for employee onboarding, but not all do, and of those who do, not all include expectations for behavior and interpersonal skills. What is taught in new-hire orientation? Are behavioral expectations made clear, and are there negative outcomes for noncompliance? This would set the stage for using the performance evaluation system as a way to address behavioral issues and bring behavioral competencies to the forefront of employee evaluations. Some companies use formal psychological evaluations when new managers are hired from outside the company, and these are generally considered to work well, if the results are not disregarded by the hiring manager.

### The Legal Context

The impact and reach of the law on destructive managerial behavior is not the primary focus of this study; however some understanding of the implications are helpful in evaluating how companies react to destructive and bullying behavior. Most states do not have laws

specifically addressing workplace bullying. I will discuss Minnesota here because it is where the majority of the respondents in this study are located, and because it is reasonably representative of the state of anti-bullying laws in the United States in general. In Minnesota an anti-workplace bullying law is currently before the state legislature; with the introduction of these bills, Minnesota became the 21<sup>st</sup> state to consider legislating against destructive workplace behavior. (Workplace Bullying Institute.) Minnesota Senate bill SF1352 is currently before the Senate Jobs and Economic Growth Committee, and a companion bill, House Bill HF1701 is before the House, but public hearings are needed for both to make additional progress. Should the bill pass it would be first clear-cut legislation in Minnesota making workplace bullying illegal and permitting action against both the perpetrators and the companies who failed to stop them. Currently the most likely options for redress are tort laws against the intentional infliction of emotional damage, which is difficult to prove due to the requirements that “plaintiffs prove extreme or outrageous conduct that caused severe distress” (Bible, p. 38). Some forms of bullying meet the legal definition of harassment and charges can be brought under those laws; specifically, in Minnesota, harassment is defined in part as :

“a single incident of physical or sexual assault or repeated incidents of intrusive or unwanted acts, words, or gestures that have a substantial adverse effect or are intended to have a substantial adverse effect on the safety, security, or privacy of another, regardless of the relationship between the actor and the intended target”

(MN 609.748 Harassment; Restraining Order)

This, of course, is not a workplace solution but would require a court case, which many victims cannot afford, as would the abused employee’s other option, which is a court case against the company for enforcement of written procedures. Given that many companies have written codes of conduct and policies governing such behaviors, precedent suggests that a case could be made for legal enforcement of the policies in the employee handbook, if the handbook or

policies were written and presented to the employee in such a way that they constituted offer and acceptance, may be enforceable as an employment contract. (*Pine River State Bank v. Mettelle, 1983*) Since *Pine River*, companies have learned to publish employee handbooks with disclaimers inserted stating that the handbook does not constitute a contract, but the potential still exists and *Pine River* continues to be cited in court cases and is still considered a significant precedent.

Another potential legal avenue is Respondeat Superior, which is a common-law doctrine which holds an employer responsible for the actions of an employee when the actions take place within the scope of employment. In theory it is holding the enterprise liable for torts committed by employees when the torts are enabled by the employee's position in the company. An example which is on point here is *Marston v. Minneapolis Clinic of Psychiatry and Neurology, Ltd. (1982)* which held a psychiatric clinic liable for one of its therapist's sexual misconduct with patients because as therapist his was a position of power over those he was treating. The Minnesota Supreme Court noted that "'Whether [an intentional] act was within scope of employment should include consideration of whether acts were foreseeable, related to and connected with duties of employee and were committed during work-related limits of time and place.'" (*Marston v. Minneapolis Clinic of Psychiatry and Neurology, Ltd. 1982*) This has been both narrowly and broadly construed by the courts since 1982, but it seems clear that companies will on occasion be held vicariously responsible for torts committed by employees while on the job, and it is something for companies to be aware of.

## The Ethical Basis For Corporate Anti-Bullying Policies

Finally, what is the ethical basis for expectations of good behavior in the workplace? What ethical systems inform corporate policies? Can, or should a company's policies be rooted in a specific ethical approach? Johnson (2009) discusses various ethical standards which can form the basis of an organization's decisions about employee behavior. These include the utilitarian approach, which is described as the greatest good for the greatest number of people. This would support taking action to terminate the employment of people whose impact on the organization is destructive, but the difficulty lies in achieving consensus on what is and is not good for the organization. The categorical imperative as described by the philosopher Immanuel Kant, would have us do the right thing no matter what the cost. While this may sound beneficial, in practice it presents challenges. Among others, there are generally exceptions to laws and rules, even those considered universal, and unquestioned application of discipline can lead to acting on symptomatic behaviors rather than on searching out and addressing root causes. The Harvard philosopher John Rawls developed another way of evaluating ethical questions that is known as justice as fairness. His way of evaluating ethical decisions was something of a thought experiment known as the veil of ignorance. In this, the decision-makers are asked what would be the fair and rational decision to make if you knew nothing about what your own position or abilities would be in the given circumstances, which helps people to arrive at fair and thoughtful decisions. In the case of destructive managerial behavior, the question that might be asked is "what policies would I put in place to deal with toxic behavior if I were unable to know whether I would be the target of a toxic manager?" The ensuing discussions about managing toxic behavior would be less likely to be biased since all examples are hypothetical and none of those involved in the discussion would be speaking from their own current position. This does, of

course, leave open the question of what is right and what is wrong. Rawls was seeking a balance between liberty and equality, and the difficulty with determining the right thing to do lies in that dichotomy. According to Rawls, the veil of ignorance as described above would elicit good ethical decisions.

One can even look to Martin Buber, who in *I and Thou* (trans. 1970) discusses people's interactions with each other and notes that until people recognize each other's humanity and treat each other with the respect that this should engender, bad behavior is almost to be expected. People who treat others like they are things rather than people are not going to behave in ways that are rooted in respect.

This paper proposes that organizations must balance their responsibilities to their employees – in this instance, the person whose behavior is destructive, as it is important to remember that the toxic manager is also an employee and should be given an opportunity to correct his or her behavior; to the team – how is the destructive manager affecting other employees?, and finally to the business itself, when destructive behavior begins to affect the organization's ability to run its business. This balance can be visualized as follows:

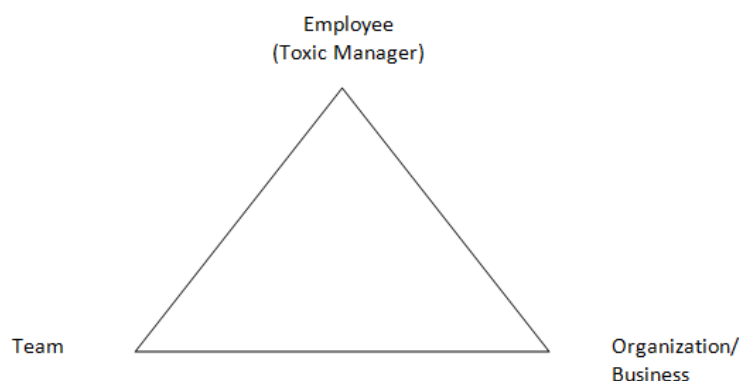


Figure 3, Graphic developed by Featherston and Nelson, 2009

I developed this graphic with Jolynn Nelson, who was at that time a fellow MAOL student. We explored the ethical issues surrounding terminating employees for cause, and how the differing responsibilities that employers have need to be balanced and weighed against each other. We developed this triangle to show the balance between the different stakeholders' perspectives and needs.

The triangle may not be equilateral in all situations or all organizations, but it does provide a way to think about the impact of destructive behavior. If the toxic manager is permitted to continue with destructive interpersonal behavior, the balance will be damaged and the organization or the other employees may suffer. The triangle of responsibility as shown here is also more or less analogous to the grid developed by Einarsen et al, in that it weighs behavior and the impacts of behavior against what is good for the organization and for other employees. This concept, as well as this method of evaluating destructive managerial behavior will be at the core of both the design of research instruments and the evaluation and analysis of the data obtained by this study.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

It would be extremely unusual for a company or organization to be lucky enough that the question of how to deal effectively with destructive managerial behavior never arises. Most companies will, at some point, have to decide how to manage such behavior. The development of a framework for evaluating the impacts of the destructive behavior versus the conditions in the work environment for other employees and the impacts on the corporate culture and the company's ability to run its business effectively should help companies come to grips with how to think about such situations. It might also provide an outline for processes which can be adapted for use. In support of this, the research question for this study was "what policies and processes should companies follow when dealing with toxic managerial behavior"?

In order to thoroughly investigate this question, I took a three-stage approach to my research. The first stage was a review of the available literature. There is significant work being done in the area of destructive workplace behavior and while there was little that addressed my specific research question, the literature review provided an excellent basis for defining destructive behavior and evaluating the impacts on organizations. This was the foundation upon which my own research was based and the results are described in detail in Chapter 2.

The second stage of my research was a survey which I wanted to ask local members of two national Human Resources professional organizations to take. In the event, neither organization was willing to permit me to send an email to their membership to solicit survey respondents; instead I was permitted to post the link to the survey on one organization's Facebook and LinkedIn page, and a helpful Human Resources professional sent the link to an H.R. listserv. In the end, the number of respondents was small but the answers themselves were detailed and provided a great deal of insight. Finally, the third stage in my research was a series



of interviews designed to dig deeper into the experiences the interviewees had with destructive managerial behavior.

### Survey

The survey was designed to discover two things: first, what processes and policies the respondents' organizations follow when dealing with toxic managers and second, whether, in the opinions of the respondents, these processes and policies are effective, and if not, what would the HR professionals prefer as an alternate protocol? Embedded in the survey was a consent agreement which includes the option for the respondents of providing their names and contact information if they were willing to participate in follow-up interviews. The survey responses were analyzed to discover what companies do to deal with destructive managerial behavior, whether it is effective, and what the basis for the policies appears to be – how do companies evaluate their managers' behavior, and what is the ethical basis for such evaluations?

### Interviews

The next step was a series of in-depth interviews. The interview protocol was designed to elicit additional detail from those who are willing to be interviewed. As a counterpoint to the Human Resources perspective, I also interviewed seven professionals who work in other functional areas (that is, not in Human Resources) with the same protocol and questions, to gain insight into how different the impact of destructive managerial behavior looks to others in the organization versus HR professionals. The interviews were all approximately an hour in length and were recorded. The interview subjects for non-HR interviews were drawn from the ranks of students and alumni of the Master of Arts in Organizational Leadership at St. Catherine

University in St. Paul, Minnesota. The use of MAOL students and alumni is a convenience sample which will provide an accessible population with a known level of professional experience, as most MAOL students have significant work experience and do not enter the program directly following their undergraduate educations.

The evaluation of the interview transcripts and the survey results were integrated into a summary of current practices, an evaluation of what seems to work and what does not, and a conclusion covering what was learned from the survey and the interviews.

The analysis of the data thus obtained will provide the basis for development of a framework that companies or managers can use to evaluate destructive managerial behavior in their own organizations, and to guide decisions in dealing with these destructive employees.

### Validity

I have come to this topic as one might expect: having had to deal with a destructive manager in my own professional past, I believe strongly that the better prepared an organization is to deal with destructive behavior, the better its management of a destructive manager will be. I also believe that no company can expect to be exempt from the hiring mistakes that lead to the employment of destructive personalities, whether in management or in other roles. This is something that I feel strongly about. Its impact on the company's business, on its culture, and on its individual employees, is potentially devastating. I was also aware that while my experiences may predispose me to judgment, I was obliged to prevent my own biases from slanting my research and endeavored to identify and filter out such sources of bias. I knew that I would be predisposed to find evidence that companies must be prepared to deal with toxic managers, but knowing that in advance will prepare me to consciously disregard my predisposition.

I designed this study to gather data from a number of sources- utilizing triangulation to obtain both breadth and depth in my research. My literature review was extensive and helps to set the stage, define the research question, and place it in context. I have interviewed both Human Resources managers and professionals from other functional areas to obtain perspective from their various points of view. The survey results provided breadth and a sense of what policies companies utilize, and the interviews produced more detail about what the individuals who have used and lived with those policies – or who struggled with the results - think of their efficacy.

My survey was designed to elicit honest answers from respondents without shaping those answers, and I was careful to manage my interviews so that my opinions did not intrude into the interview process, but rather let the respondents speak for themselves and take the interviews in the direction that they believe is significant. Additionally, before the interviews began, I obtained input on the protocol from my advisor to ensure that any bias unnoticed by me was weeded out. The use of volunteer respondents from the Human Resources field and from the ranks of MAOL students and alumni did result in a selection bias of a sort: All of my respondents had in fact dealt with a destructive manager in some way. However, as the research was not intended to discover the incidence of destructive managerial behavior but rather how it was dealt with, the selection of respondents in this way did not bias the answers that were relevant to the research question.

Because all of my respondents had been through the process of dealing with destructive managerial behavior, either as a Human Resources professional or as a colleague or direct report of the destructive manager, they had all given considerable thought to their experiences, which

provided a depth of data in addition to the breadth obtained by having as respondents people from a number of organizations and industries.

## **Chapter 4: Presentation of Results and Discussion**

An evaluation of how companies deal with destructive managerial behaviors and whether their practices are effective is an issue about which almost anyone with a job will have an opinion. The goal of my research for this paper was first, to learn what work has been done already by performing a thorough literature review. Second, then, I proposed to survey Human Resources professionals since they will tend to be in the thick of things when an organization is dealing with toxic behavior, followed by some in-depth interviews of those Human Resources professionals who offered to be interviewed. This survey netted thirty-six people who accessed the survey and twenty who completed the whole thing. While the sample is admittedly small, it was not intended to be exhaustive or statistically representative of any particular group of organizations but rather to bring both depth and breadth to the data. Those who completed the survey did, for the most part, take the time to give enough detail to bring a great deal of insight to how management of destructive behaviors looks from the Human Resources perspective.

The second part of the data-gathering consisted of in-depth interviews with managers and professionals from the ranks of MAOL students and alumni. As noted in the Methodology section, this convenience sample permitted access to a population with a known level of experience. In the end I interviewed eight professionals from functional areas outside Human Resources and three Human Resources managers. There is consistency in the data gathered from the survey and the interviews; there are, as we will see, some differences between the viewpoints of the Human Resources professionals and those who work in other functional areas. Together, though, they provide a well-rounded if not exhaustive assessment of the ability of the respondents' organizations to deal with destructive managerial behavior. The results will be organized here by topic, and within each topic I will contrast the input received from Human

Resources managers to that received from people from other functional areas, with the goal of assessing what companies think they are doing, what actually happens, and how effective it is based on the resulting impacts on the organization's employees, on the organization's business, and on the destructive manager him- or herself.

### Respondents' Experience with Toxic Managerial Behavior

The first question in both the survey and the interview protocol was simply to ask whether the respondent had ever been thrust into a working situation with a manager whose behavior could be described as destructive? (Destructive behavior was defined for the respondents using the definition from Einarsen, Aasland, and Skogstad (2007), "the systematic and repeated behavior by a leader, supervisor or manager that violates the legitimate interest of the organization by undermining and/or sabotaging the organization's goals, tasks, resources, and effectiveness and/or the motivation, well-being or job satisfaction of his/her subordinates." (p. 208). Not surprisingly, all of the respondents answered "yes" to this question. The survey did actually elicit one "no" answer, but since that respondent answered subsequent questions with significant detail about a destructive manager that his or her company had hired, it can be suggested that the wording of the question caused some confusion. The question asked, "Has your company ever hired a destructive, or toxic manager?", and given the negative response and subsequent detail around just that, it may be that the respondent meant to indicate that the incident occurred at a previous employer. Analysis of the "no" respondent's complete comments established that in fact all of the respondents all had at least some experience with dealing with toxic managers.

All of the interviewees had also, not surprisingly, had some experience with a destructive manager.

### How Well are Companies Prepared for this?

The second question asked of Human Resources professionals was whether or not their company was prepared to deal with the impact of destructive managerial behavior on their organization; 37% said yes, and 63% said no. Even those who responded positively did believe that there were aspects to the situation that could have been handled better by their company, though, including the length of time it took to address the issue and failure to set firm expectations at the time of hire. Overwhelmingly, the respondents to this survey as well as the interviewees felt that the destructive behavior was not managed well by their company, as we will see.

A particularly interesting dichotomy developed in that the Human Resources professionals stated that recognition of the new manager's behavior as destructive occurred fairly early on:

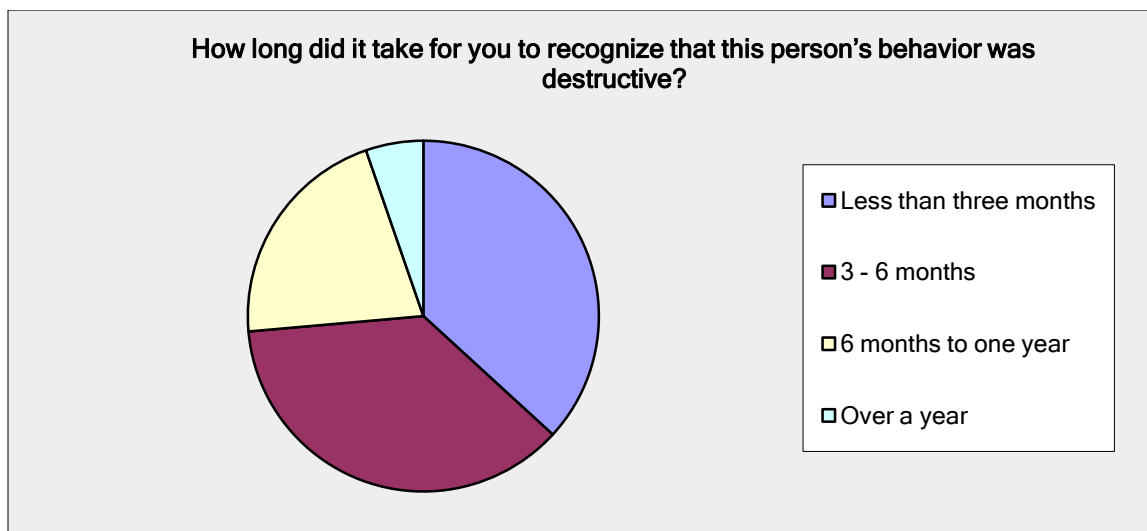


Figure 4, Time Elapsed Before Employee's Destructive Behavior is Recognized

This is interesting in that most of the H.R. survey respondents also said that it took their company longer than it should have to resolve the problem. That is, individual employees were aware of the problem earlier than the company as an institution was, and even once the company identified the problem, additional time elapsed before it was addressed.

This was echoed by the non-HR interviewees. All of the interviewees stated that their particular toxic manager was permitted to stay on the job for an average duration of at least three years, with the longest time to correct the problem being ten years (and quite a few were never resolved and the destructive manager was still in place and still behaving in unprofessional and destructive ways). This indicates that though companies may believe themselves to be prepared to deal with destructive behaviors, actually doing so is a longer process than any of the respondents were comfortable with, given the resulting impact on employee morale, the corporate culture and occasionally even the company's business.

#### What Do Companies Do About This?

Eleven of the twenty Human Resources respondents stated that the companies first tried coaching, counseling, or mandatory training. Most often, Human Resources personnel are not the decision-makers in such situations, but are resources for the destructive manager's supervisor or manager, giving advice and providing tools but without the authority to insist on a particular action. Some respondents were clearly frustrated with this – one stated that “(the behavior) was tolerated – HR often functioned to defuse issues he created, to console staff”. It was also noted more than once that management was often unaware of the problem manager's behavior because the toxic manager behaved badly only in front of staff. This was borne out by the interviewees;



several of them stated that the destructive manager would often behave significantly differently with upper management and only exhibit destructive behavior to peers and subordinates.

Eight of the twenty H. R. respondents reported that eventually, the destructive manager was terminated, or allowed to resign. The percentage of terminated destructive managers among the non-HR interviewees was lower, but the samples in each case are too small to allow conclusions to be drawn. A significant fraction of the respondents reported that management simply refused to correct the situation, either because the corporate culture was such that once an individual achieves promotion to manager, his or her actions are no longer questioned, or because the individual in question was perceived to have unique and irreplaceable skills. In the instance reported by one interviewee, this was what was told to employees who were dealing with insulting and dismissive conduct from a manager for ten years – right up until the manager was finally terminated and the organization discovered that in fact it would continue to survive without the supposedly unique skillsets this person had.

### What Worked and What Failed

There are two levels of effectiveness to be discussed. First is the more direct: Did the company effectively address the destructive managerial behavior and correct it? The second involves the effect on other employees: how much damage was done while the destructive interpersonal behavior was being addressed? Given the alarming rate at which bullied employees will quit their jobs to get away from destructive managers, it seems clear that organizations need to find a way to let people know that their concerns are being taken seriously and addressed appropriately without breaching confidentiality or being unfair to the manager

whose behavior is being complained about – because that person, too, is an employee and deserves a chance to get it right.

I will discuss these individually, first the direct questions and then the less direct ones.

### Don't Hire Toxic People

Sutton (2007) noted that the best way to avoid assholes is not hiring them in the first place. This is not always as easy as it might seem, but there are often behavioral clues during the interview process and if these are noted, they should be discussed and the hiring manager should proceed with caution. This was one of the items that Pearson and Porath (2009) listed as what companies must do to create a civil workplace: “Do thorough reference checks to weed out problem individuals” (p. 143) It’s undeniable that not hiring people who can be identified as problem during the interview process is the best way to avoid dealing with them later. The use of hiring teams and letting the people who will work with the prospective employee be part of the selection process can help if the company is prepared to act on telltale behaviors observed during interviews and decline to hire people despite their technical qualifications. Additionally, some companies find that psychological evaluations are helpful in evaluating potential managerial hires.

It is also important, when hiring, to make expectations clear. Companies generally have job descriptions prepared for new employees and make it clear what they are expected to do within the organization, but it is less common to set expectations for interpersonal behavior. Both the Human Resources respondents and the non-H.R. interviewees noted that the failure to set behavioral expectations at the time of hiring will make it difficult to address the problem later.

## Coaching and Training

Coaching and training are not regarded as a successful way to deal with destructive managers, by either group. Several H.R. respondents observed that most destructive managers could manage to improve their behavior at least incrementally but generally only for a limited time, while they were being scrutinized. The short period of improvement was almost always followed by a relapse to previous behaviors. One H.R. respondent was even more cynical, stating “Should not be an HR role, but if the line management doesn’t handle, HR takes over, holds a meeting to share feedback, the toxic manager agrees to be a good guy, and goes back and gets even”. Clearly this was not the most productive way to deal with the problem, and yet it is apparently not unusual since another respondent said nearly the same thing: “Avoidance and denial, boss coaching, victory announced, then the cycle repeated.” The literature review showed the same pattern and many researchers concluded, as did some of the H.R. respondents that most of the time, destructive behavior is an innate personality trait and not situational. If so, coaching and counseling are unlikely to help. It should be noted that destructive interpersonal behavior can be traced to other causes – it is unlikely that all toxic behavior is either innate or situational. Poor communication skills, previous abuse, bad role models, and so forth could all result in unacceptable behavior in the workplace; and it is possible that a course of corrective action, with clear expectations set out and ongoing follow-up, may help in these instances.

Namie and Namie (2011) noted, with respect to training, the same problem: “...training is an inadequate answer – for several reasons. First, it generally fixes only deficiencies in skills. Furthermore, the trainee has to be willing to learn something new. Bullies already overestimate their personal capabilities and believe they can be taught little. Training, therefore, is a far from

ideal way to handle them.” Additionally, they note, “remedial supervisory training is seen as punishment and could therefore backfire.” (pp 117 – 118).

### Use of Performance Evaluations

Some companies will make use of their performance assessment systems to do deal with destructive managerial behavior, but even in companies that had a performance assessment system that actually measured behavioral or interpersonal competencies rarely used them to good effect when dealing with destructive managers. Both sets of respondents agreed that there are several problems with using performance assessment systems when dealing with toxic managers:

- Employees will often avoid giving honest responses for fear of reprisal
- Other employees will avoid being critical for fear of “getting someone in trouble”
- Even if honest input is gathered, the manager giving the review can usually choose to disregard it

A performance assessment system has high potential for dealing with destructive behavior but the company and its management must be firm about getting and using honest input. One cannot put an employee on report for a single instance or complaint, but when there are multiple employees saying similar things and more than one example, the company is remiss in allowing upper management to ignore it.

### Termination

Most of the H.R. people whose organizations took the step of terminating the destructive manager reported that doing so restored trust in management and in the organization as a whole; that it allowed other employees to see that such behavior would have clear consequences, and it allowed other employees to know that the particular person and the unacceptable behavior had

been dealt with. It was also noted by both sets of respondents that termination is, sadly, usually the only effective way of correcting the toxic interpersonal behavior.

### Lack of Transparency

It was clear from the research that one of the biggest problems in working through the issues surrounding toxic interpersonal behavior in an organization is the lack of transparency in the process. This is a situation in which what is undeniably a feature in the system is also a significant bug: the toxic manager is also an employee and any training, coaching, or corrective action that is attempted must be kept confidential. Several H.R. respondents noted this, observing that confidentiality requirements meant that employees could not be told that their manager was being coached or was on an improvement plan. Certainly it is clear that if there is any chance that the manager will change his or her behavior and begin to be an effective manager, their credibility and even their ability to recover from the period of toxic behavior would be undermined by their direct reports' knowledge of previous disciplinary action against the manager.

Still, the single most repeated comment among the non-H.R. respondents was that because they could not know what, if anything was being done to address the toxic behavior, their assumption was that it was not in fact being addressed. One interviewee told of a situation where the company policy was in fact "three strikes and you're out" but the employees whose complaints became the first two strikes were not told of either the policy or the fact that it was being deployed in this instance, assumed that nothing was being done, and left the company. It was only when the interviewee went to H.R. and found that she was the third person to bring H.R. concerns about the behavior of the destructive manager that the status of the manager

became public – because the manager was terminated within a week of the respondent’s complaint. As she noted in her interview, the system worked for her, but she regarded the first two people who had complained, to no apparent avail, as sacrifices to the need for confidentiality and to the three-strike rule.

Namie and Namie (2011) wrote of an online survey that they conducted in 2008, in which bullied employees were asked what their employers did when the bullying was reported. 53% reported that nothing was done, 40% reported an inadequate or biased investigation, and only 7% reported a fair investigation and resolution. This is in line with what the non-H.R. respondents to this study reported: even those who understood the need for confidentiality noted that from their perspective the response was either completely ineffective or simply too little, too late.

### Duration

Of all the responses given by both groups about what was not effective about the way their companies dealt with destructive behavior was that it took too long. The duration of the problem ranged from less than a year and a half to ten years, but the respondents nearly all made comments about how it was too long. The H.R. respondents noted that sometimes as many as ten complaints are required before an investigation is launched and action taken. A few actually did say that a single instance would be taken seriously, if it were substantiated and depending upon the severity of the behavior, but it was far more common for companies to require multiple examples from more than one person before action is taken. Unfortunately, the time required to gather sufficient data to act means that employees will be subject to abuse while the company investigates. H.R. managers are a bit more conservative about what durations are acceptable, noting that for a new manager or a manager hired from outside, it’s often possible to arrive at

termination within a year or so, but at senior management levels it's much harder and takes much longer.

The non-H.R. respondents were nearly unanimous in stating that because the destructive manager is also an employee who deserves an opportunity to correct his or her behavior, a certain amount of time must elapse for that opportunity to be given. But most of them were speaking in terms of three to six months, not years, and one senior manager whose Vice-President boss was the destructive one at her company stated unequivocally that thirty days is long enough when people are being abused and the business of the company is being affected.

### Listening

It was noted by several H.R. respondents that listening to concerned employees and taking their input seriously helped them to deal with their destructive boss or colleague. On the flip side, several of the non-H.R. respondents noted the reverse: that taking their input but not following up and apparently not taking action would generally drive morale even lower. Sutton (2007) noted that it's not enough to have rules about behavior: it's necessary to document it and to be willing to act on it. Having a rule and not acting on it has a worse impact on employee morale than not having the rule.

### What Could Have Been Done Better?

Both the H.R. respondents and the non-H.R. interviewees had constructive suggestions for what companies could do better. The Human Resources people differed from the non-H.R. people primarily in that they were, from their responses, willing to be a bit more patient with the destructive manager. This appears to be partly because they take a broader view, having specific

responsibilities to the entire organization, but also partly, perhaps simply because they do not, as a rule, see the toxic behavior.

### At the Time of Hire

As noted above, one of the areas where companies can do a great deal to eliminate destructive behavior is in hiring – by choosing not to hire people whose behavior is unacceptable. The H.R. professionals had a number of good suggestions, ranging from using references better – not just the references provided by the prospective hire, but going to the next level as well and calling previous employers and colleagues. Further, it was suggested that having clear expectations for managerial and professional behavior set out on the corporate Code of Conduct – and then being willing to enforce it – would help a great deal.

### Pay Attention, and Address the Issue

It was noted that management and Human Resources should pay closer attention to day to day activity, and when toxic behavior begins to manifest itself, to be willing to take action. Seven of the twenty H.R. respondents noted that the managers of the toxic individuals were either “too gentle” or not direct enough in dealing with the behaviors, and often were clearly at a loss to know how to deal with it at all. Having these discussions with people who are predisposed to destructive behavior is far from easy, but setting forth expectations and consequences is the only way to set the stage for any kind of resolution, whether it may be coaching or whether it simply leads to termination.

This is in line with what was seen in the literature. Sutton (2007) stated, “Say the rule, write it down, and act on it” (p. 87) – speaking of the eponymous No Asshole Rule, and then



makes it clear that management must also “manage moments – not just practices, policies, and systems.” (p. 88). By this he meant that focusing on day to day interactions and correcting little things will lead to better management of grosser misconduct as well. Similarly, Namie and Namie (2011) suggested steps to mobilize one’s organization against bullying. Among them are recognizing the bullying – the day to day destructive behavior, intervening wherever possible, and to hold management accountable for the behavior occurring on their watch. (pp. 105 – 110)

Caponecchia and Wyatt (2011) suggest the use of a risk assessment model to evaluate workplace bullying. At first glance it seems a bit cumbersome to complete a full risk assessment for toxic workplace behavior, but it would help the organization and its managers to clarify their thinking about the varying impacts of different behaviors and to determine what the effects on the other employees and the organization are. This would, in turn, serve as the basis for refining policies governing destructive behavior and the company’s reaction to it.

### Respond to Employee Concerns

The non-H.R. professionals were much more likely to insist on shorter timelines, as noted above, but also much more likely to suggest demoting the toxic manager so that he or she no longer managed people. The non-H.R. people also noted that upper management and H.R. should, after receiving input from multiple employees concerned about toxic behavior, check back with the employees to determine if any improvement had been made. One respondent reported that when a number of people at her company went to upper management with concerns about a bullying manager, were shocked and dumbfounded when their V.P. came back to see them and informed them that things were much better now. This input regarding improvement came, of course, from the destructive manager herself.

Here, again, we find that there are issues on more than one level with failing to deal with the toxic manager correctly. First, the behavior continues. Second, if the complaints and concerns of bullied employees are not responded to in such a way that indicates they're taken seriously and believed, from the employee's viewpoint, the bullying is being accepted or even condoned, and not addressed, which damages the work environment and possibly the business itself if employees become disengaged.

### Transparency

The most significant differences in responses between the groups of respondents were in the answers to the question, "If employees come to HR about an abusive manager, how is their input accepted and dealt with?" Most of the HR respondents believed that employees' input was accepted and acted on. Several noted that the appropriate action will depend upon whether the input is coming from a single employee or from multiple people; and whether H.R. can substantiate the claims by observation or investigation. Unfortunately, as noted above, due to confidentiality concerns, this is often not clear to the employees, and as a result many people come to feel that it's futile to go to H.R., or even that they would fear to do so under the assumption that they would make things worse for themselves. One respondent was told, when she went to Human Resources about the destructive behavior of her V.P., that the situation is what it is and that she might want to start looking for another job. There is serious disconnect between the perception of the Human Resources professionals and those of the non-H.R. respondents. This is not surprising, but in that several non-H.R. respondents used language such as "people felt that their credibility was questioned" or "their concerns were not validated

because H.R. did not appear to be taking any action”, it is clear that the disconnect has become part of the problem.

### Be Willing to Act

There was additional disconnect in response to the question “If a new manager begins to exhibit toxic behavior, what steps are taken to address it?” Nearly all of the Human Resources professionals indicated that action was taken; the destructive manager was coached and usually put on a performance improvement plan. One H.R. person noted that companies that had been through the process with destructive managers before were more likely to take action more quickly, but almost all of the H.R. respondents indicated that some attempt at working with the destructive manager and modifying the behavior was at least attempted. One person noted that improvement has to be visible, which ties in with the non-H.R. respondents’ comments about nothing apparently being done. It is a good point, and will be revisited in the last chapter of this paper. Responses from the non-H.R. people, who were unable to see either the coaching, the performance improvement plans, or any improvement, often indicated that people assume that because there is no apparent result, that nothing is being done. Several noted that the destructive person’s manager could choose not to address the situation. This was actually borne out by a pair of questions in the survey sent to the Human Resources professionals: when asked whether a destructive employee’s manager had the latitude to overlook toxic behavior, 60% said yes and 40% said no. On the other hand, the same group of respondents indicated that H.R. did not have the same latitude to ignore behavior. Here, 26% said yes, H.R. could overlook destructive behavior and 74% said no. This indicated that at the majority of companies, once destructive

behavior is reported to Human Resources, some investigation and response should be forthcoming, whether the concerned employees are allowed to see it or not.

Similarly, when the H.R. people were asked “how does your company react to complaints about a manager by an employee?” sixteen of the twenty indicated that it would be taken seriously and a formal investigation undertaken. Some indicated that more observations might be required, but very few of the Human Resources respondents indicated anything other than that the situation would be taken seriously and addressed as a real problem. Here again, though, is the disconnect with the non-H.R. people in that almost none of them saw any evidence of the kind of response that the H.R. professionals indicated would be undertaken. This is not to say that it didn’t happen, simply that for many of the people who were subjected to abusive behavior on the part of their managers, the investigation wasn’t visible, there was no apparent change in the toxic manager’s behavior, and as the duration of the investigation would often be a matter of years rather than months, people would simply not know that anything was happening.

#### How Does All of This Serve Those Involved?

As discussed in the Conceptual Context section, it is the working premise of this paper that in order to minimize the damage caused by destructive managerial behavior, organizations must find a balance between their commitments to individual employees (including the toxic manager), to the other employees as a team, and to the business of the organization itself. To explore that, the survey and interviews asked just that.

### Is the Toxic Manager Served?

The first question to address this was, “How does your company’s approach to dealing with destructive behaviors serve the destructive employee?” Answers to this from the Human Resources respondents were divided between those who believed their company dealt well with the situation and those who didn’t. Those whose companies did address the situation reasonably successfully responded with such comments as “it did make it clear that he had to change in order to succeed here” or “it brings it out into the open so it can be dealt with fairly”. Others who were less sanguine about their company’s success logged responses such as “It doesn’t serve the destructive employee at all, as it enables them to continue their behavior” or “there is often collusion to announce victory, and subordinates give up and the manager is left to create misery as he is moved from place to place”. It may be that there is no way to deal with destructive managers that is painless and works for everyone, but it is clear that many companies have considerable room for improvement.

The non-H.R. respondents answered similarly. Answers ranged from “It didn’t help her at all. I think she could have been helped but she wasn’t.” to “Nothing was done, she’s still there and behaving this way”. As noted previously, those to whom the process of performance improvement plans is not visible tend to have a more negative view of the process and believe that nothing is done because the behavior is not corrected.

Sutton (2007) noted that “assholes suffer too. Demeaning jerks are victims of their own actions. They suffer career setbacks and at times, humiliation. A hallmark of assholes is that they sap the energy from victims and bystanders. People who persistently leave others feeling de-energized undermine their own performance by turning coworkers and bosses against them and stifling motivation throughout their social networks.” (pp. 33-34) This seems obvious once

it is pointed out; it comes through from both the data from study respondents and from personal experience in that people who are willing to humiliate and berate their colleagues are simply not going to obtain any kind of collaboration or teamwork from those they abuse.

### Are the Other Employees Served?

Similarly, when asked the question, “How does your company’s approach to dealing with destructive behaviors serve the other employees of the company?” the H.R. respondents were very cognizant that because other employees often cannot see either the performance improvement plan or any repercussions for the behavior until such a time that the destructive manager is terminated (if he or she is terminated), they are often very frustrated. The non-H.R. respondents were more blunt about this, interpreting it less as frustration as being disregarded and not considered at all. This is when the company begins to lose good employees; when people can see bad behavior but cannot see that it is being dealt with, they often assume that the company is unwilling to address or incapable of correcting the behavior and move on, costing the company in training, recruitment to replace, and in damage to the company’s corporate culture and reputation. The H.R. professionals tended to take a longer view, and believed that once the destructive manager was terminated, other employees would see that the process worked, but the non-H.R. respondents were not always able to see the long view and often left the company. With their departure, they often take a bitter attitude toward the company and its processes and its willingness to support its employees. Pearson and Porath (2009) clearly stated that complaints must be taken seriously and noted as well that since many employees are reluctant to bring complaints to management, when it does happen the complaint must be investigated and address if management is to retain the trust of employees.

### Is the Work Environment Served?

The third question addressing this issue is “How does your company’s approach to dealing with destructive behaviors serve the work environment?” and a similar divide was apparent here as well. The Human Resources respondents were able to take the long view – partly because they knew that there was something being done, and partly because they were not living in the path of destruction wreaked by the toxic manager. A number of them said things like “I hope it allows people to feel comfortable speaking their mind” or “Need to address these issues, or other employees will feel like they are not valued and their work will suffer”. This recognition that for the most part other employees do not in fact see the process until and unless the destructive manager is terminated, as well as the tentative phrasing of the answers “I hope” and “Need to do” rather than “this is what happens” or “this is what we do” shows that the process is far from perfect from the point of view of the work environment and corporate culture.

Again, the answers from the non-H.R. respondents were even more to the point. Responses to this question were almost completely negative and included such statements as “it was awful, people were miserable, and the department admin left in tears most days” and “the work environment is destructive and un-collaborative and even uncaring”. While it is important to keep in mind that these respondents were among those who were damaged by the toxic manager’s behavior, it was also made clear from the responses of most of the non-H.R. respondents that the damage was almost never contained within the destructive manager’s department – others are generally affected to some degree, though not nearly as directly as the toxic manager’s own direct reports.

### Is The Company's Business Served?

The same question was asked with regard to the company's business interests: how does the company's approach to dealing with toxic behavior serve the business itself? This question also showed a significant difference in perspective between the Human Resources respondents and the non-H.R. people. The Human Resources people recognized the problems – word of destructive behavior does tend to get out into the marketplace and affect the company's reputation and its business – but were more sanguine that the toxic behavior was being dealt with effectively. Their answers to this question ranged from “Employees who feel part of the organization, care about the business and its products, are proud of what they do – care also about our customer and about the products that they make” and “the company brand is impacted by how well, or how poorly, we deliver on the promises we make to employees, which impacts our standing as a company and as an employer”.

The non-H.R. respondents saw, again, only the negative impacts on the business and not the process itself and tended to answer in a more negative vein. Their responses were such comments as “it didn't (serve the business). It affected employees, and the business, and the company's customers” and “it didn't. There is a revolving door, and employees don't stay long enough to make an impact”.

The impact of destructive behavior on businesses has been discussed by Pearson and Porath (2009). They point out that people who are treated badly will become disengaged; will put in fewer hours and less effort to meet corporate goals; they will spend time trying to avoid the toxic behavior and thus reduce efficiency, and their preoccupation with the destructive behavior lessens the time they spend thinking about their work. The cost to the business in lost productivity is far from the only impact, either. Sutton (2007) points out that destructive



behavior will dilute the destructive employee's manager's performance by requiring increased time spent on the bad behavior; that it will require additional time spent by Human Resources; and if the end result is that the destructive employee is terminated, then there are costs in consulting employment counsel, costs to recruit a replacement, and so on. Simply recognizing these costs as being similar to other costs of running a business in that they are manageable and reducible if the behavior that causes them is managed properly will lead to the conclusion that the well-being of the organization's employees is not the only reason to address destructive behavior.

### Balance

The next set of questions addressed the balance that the company must inevitably find between being supportive of its business, its individual employees (e.g., the destructive manager) and the other employees as a team or as individuals. This is an area where individual organizations may well find that their own sense of balance is not what works for another company across town, but from the responses and the depth of feeling in the answers, it is critical for companies to make these decisions rationally and consciously, with the company's and the employees' interests in mind.

This series of questions asked about where the balance tips between giving the new manager a chance to become effective and not making other employees absorb undue destructive behavior; where the balance tips between fairness to the new manager and to the corporate culture; where the balance tips between fairness to the new manager and keeping the workplace environment healthy; and finally asked respondents to rank, in order of importance, individual employees, all employees as a group, and the work environment and corporate culture.

While that one respondent skipped this question, the results show that overwhelmingly, Human Resources professionals chose the work environment and corporate culture as most important, never chose employees as a team as being primary at all, and a significant fraction chose individual employees. There is a fine line between making the work environment and corporate culture the focus of concern and considering the employees as a group to be the most important; but there is a distinction in that the work environment is an effect on employees and is not a direct consideration of the employees themselves.

Many of the non-H.R. people stated that the team should come first, generally followed by the business and then the individual. Their responses to the questions about balance between various pairings included such statements as “it was definitely slanted to the business and the manager. The working environment was horrible for everyone around him, people were all afraid to speak or act” and “the upper management spent too much time protecting the destructive manager, and almost none realizing the effect on the work environment or the well-being of the other employees.” Further, they stated, “people need to know what’s going on. Not the details, I know there are confidentiality issues, but to know that it’s taken seriously and they were believed. From what we could see, they were more concerned about him, and he was the problem, not everyone else.”

H.R. professionals recognized the problem and had some good suggestions on how to deal with it. It was suggested that the company should make it a policy to check in with new managers and their teams at three, six, nine months before arriving at the first annual review. Another person stated that it has to start with the on-boarding process, and that the new manager’s boss has to stay closely involved for at least the first six months to ensure that the dynamics in the department are functional and productive. The H.R. people also noted that “the

feedback needs to be evidence-based and fair before action is taken”, that “if we start seeing performance slip from employee(s) then we should discuss why and where does this come from”. However, it was also recognized that not all toxic behavior can be counseled or coached away. One H.R. respondent wrote, “I am having trouble with ‘fairness’ given my view of what toxic is. Trying to correct this kind of behavior is no more challenging than stopping a husband from beating his wife, or vice-versa, i.e., it requires group therapy, counseling, and then the behavior often returns. Corporations have no business risking others while dealing with a person like this”.

### What Should Companies Do?

It was at this point in the survey and interviews that the H.R. and non-H.R. people came back together and suggested similar improvements. Almost with one voice, the respondents from both groups suggested that companies should:

- Better screening up front prior to hire, including pre-hire psychological assessments.
- Equip H.R. and executives with the ability to have difficult conversations. Do not tolerate abusive behaviors. When abusive behavior occurs, immediately write up the toxic manager and make it clear that the next complaint will mean termination – and be prepared to follow through. Employees need to trust that they are working in a safe environment.
- Monitor new managers (new hires and those newly promoted) more closely. Train and coach managers better.
- Make better use of the performance assessment system, get more feedback and listen to it. Let people know that there’s a policy and it’s taken seriously. People need to be willing to take the responsibility of speaking up.

- Timing – when issues do arise, act immediately. Let people know that such behavior is not permitted, but also let them know that they'll have a chance – one chance – to correct it. Be prepared to follow up and terminate if necessary.

The overwhelming message from all respondents in this study is that destructive managerial behavior must be dealt with in order to avoid damage to individual employees, to team dynamics, to the work environment and corporate culture and to the organization's business results. The differences in perspective are natural given the respondents' different viewpoints, but the message is clear and brings us back to what was learned from the literature review – the list above is a close match to the list quoted from Pearson and Porath (2009) in the Conceptual Context chapter of this paper. It appears that the survey respondents and the interviewees agree on the essentials and agree with the work that's been done in the past, but the message received in their responses also recognized that it is far from easy to develop a method of evaluating such behaviors and dealing with them in a way that is least damaging to all involved. To do that, organizations must, I believe, know the basis for their decisions.

## **Chapter 5: Summary, Recommendations and Conclusions**

This research was intended to learn what processes companies utilize when faced with destructive managerial behavior, to gauge the extent to which these processes work for all stakeholders, and by comparing what was learned from the research itself and the literature review, to arrive at an understanding of what should be considered when organizations must deal with toxic behavior.

The web-based survey and the interviews conducted reaped results that were more or less what was expected: companies in general could do better in dealing with destructive managerial behavior. Many companies are ill-prepared to deal with a truly destructive personality, and those that do have a process in place to manage them tend to take too long to act, and to be afraid to be seen to support the employees who bear the brunt of the toxic behavior. This is not unexpected given the litigious nature of American society, but it is nonetheless damaging to the individuals involved, to the corporate cultures and ethical values of the companies, and to the companies' businesses themselves.

### **Recommendations**

It is almost certainly not possible to devise a process whereby any organization, anywhere, can effectively deal with destructive managerial behavior. Each situation is a different, and each company's culture and expectations are different. It would be interesting to know whether there are significant variations in the tolerance of destructive behavior either by industry or by industry sector, or by nation. There may be more willingness to deal with employee volatility where technical skills outweigh behavioral problems, but such willingness should not mean overlooking the behavior altogether, and behavioral guidelines and

consciousness that such technically skilled people may be better off in non-managerial roles might be indicated. There are very few people whose technical or strategic skills truly outweigh destructive interpersonal behavior – there simply are not that many Steve Jobs out there. The literature refers to such obliquely in that there are companies with, as Sutton calls them, strict no-asshole rules who nonetheless knowingly retain people whose behavior is volatile or toxic but keep them strictly sequestered from contact with customers. (R. Sutton, personal correspondence, April 29, 2012). It seems likely that in such a situation, it would become known within the company that “so-and-so is just like that” and that fellow employees would be more able to overlook the toxic behavior, particularly if the person with the destructive personality were prohibited from managing others.

Based on the current literature and the research performed for this paper, the best path forward for most organizations would be a solid understanding of how they will deal with destructive managerial behavior, what their policy and processes will be, and what the bases for setting such policies and designing such processes are. Many companies have values statements that indicate a commitment to honesty, integrity and ethics. Examples abound:

- The employees of (Name Removed) are committed to the following values: Compassion: Caring for our clients, our co-workers, and our community. Positive Workplace: an environment of cooperative teamwork where we are accessible, flexible, and listen to and acknowledge one another: where joyful effort is the rule, not the exception.
- (Another company)’s values include: as a company, and as individuals, we value integrity, honesty, openness, personal excellence, constructive self-criticism, continual self-improvement, and mutual respect.
- (A Third Company) is deeply committed to its employees. Our goal is to enable everyone to feel supported, treated with respect, and deserving of the same treatment from co-workers that we extend to our customers and business partners.

These are strong statements. Because I am not and have never been employed by any of these three, I have no way to know whether they do or do not live by their values statements in the day to day management of their businesses, but it is critical to live up to what you claim your values are. All three of these companies may do so; if these values statements are recognized, it should be understood that they were pulled from corporate websites as examples only and not as any kind of indication that these three organizations fail to live up to what they say. The intention here is simply this: these are, as stated above, strong statements. Making such statements, posting them on corporate websites where prospective employees and customers will see them, should mean that the company is prepared to back up the statement in their decisions, day in and day out.

Companies have values statements, they have policies and they have corporate cultures, and all of these things together should address what behavior is and is not accepted in the workplace. As Pearson and Porath state, companies that wish to promote a civil and productive workplace must set zero tolerance expectations for destructive behavior. This is echoed by Sutton's No-Asshole Rule, and it is critical. It must be unacceptable to behave destructively at work. Second (referring to Pearson and Porath's prescriptive chapter 13), the company must be willing to look in the mirror, recognize and deal with destructive behavior where it occurs. Third, as was pointed out by Pearson and Porath, Namie and Namie, and Sutton – work hard to identify those whose behavior is unacceptable and keep them out of your organization. It is much simpler to refuse to hire toxic managers than to deal with them after they have joined the company. And when destructive behavior does rear its head in the workplace, be open to input from employees; investigate fairly, and be willing to require that destructive managers either behave civilly or leave – it must be clear to everyone that destructive behavior will not be

tolerated. Having a values statements or policies is not meaningful unless they are truly lived by and enforced.

To do that – to pull the values or the ethical basis for employee relations into daily activities – requires that the entire management team understands the values, understands the reasons for adopting these values, and is able to utilize this ethical underpinning in their management of employees, including destructive managers and others. The challenge to companies is this: know what your values are, be prepared to base your processes on them, and be ready to act on them. If the entire management team of an organization knows exactly what value their organization places on its individual employees vs. its business and its culture and vs. its other employees as a team, then the decisions that they make as managers will be facilitated and much more likely to be aligned with corporate values and culture. How the organization balances the relationship between individual employees (the toxic manager); the rest of the employees, and the organization’s culture and business is the basis for making decisions and setting policy to deal with destructive behavior.

Is the balance equilateral? Is it slanted toward the business first, the team second, and the individual employee third? Perhaps it’s the other way around and individuals are considered foremost. Articulating this, understanding this, will allow organizations to know what kind of people will fit well in their culture, hire accordingly, and design management processes that reflect the company’s needs and culture.

One Human Resources manager who was interviewed in addition to filling out the survey had an interesting response when asked about how this triangle should be balanced:



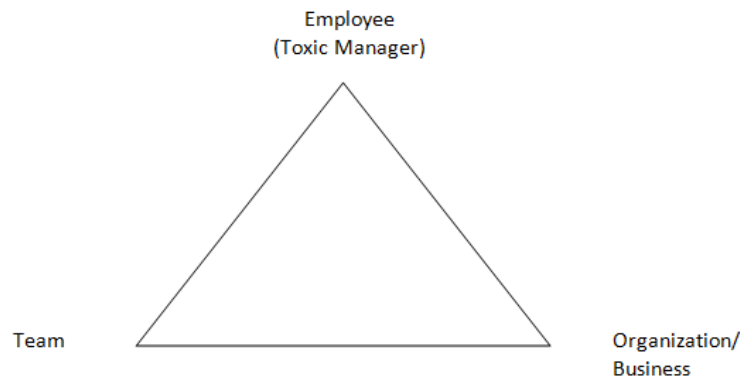


Figure 5, Featherston and Nelson (repeated)

She said that the first thing to do is when an employee comes to management or to Human Resources, is to take their concerns seriously and let them know that the problem will be investigated. Then, have a process that includes a fair investigation, during which H.R. can substantiate the complaints either by corroboration from others or by direct observation. When the complaint is valid, it must be addressed, and the destructive behavior eliminated, either by coaching and training or by terminating the toxic employee. If this is managed correctly, she said, the organization's culture and business will have been served.

A company that has processes that permit – and insist – that destructive behaviors will not be tolerated should find that the balance between the well-being of its employees and the health of the corporate culture and the business itself will be served, and the triangle of balance will become a smooth process:

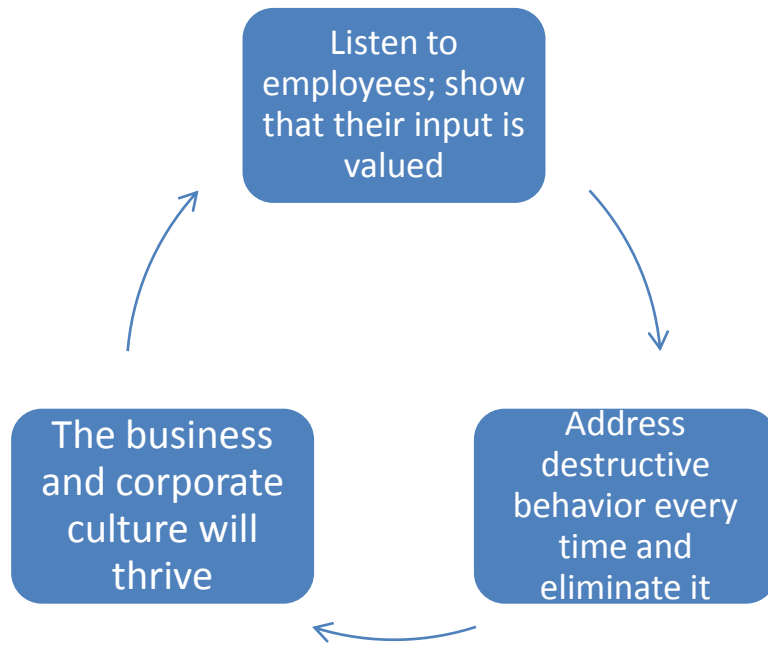


Figure 6: Achieving Balance

## Conclusions

A company that has made a conscious effort to identify what it considers important and lives by those values should find that its processes and decisions will fall into line. If it's true that the employees are valued, as indicated by the values statements propounded by many companies, then there should be a concomitant willingness to take action in eliminating destructive managerial behavior. The results of this research show that those companies that have processes for dealing with toxic managers are generally doing the right things. They're taking action, working with the employee, and are willing, when nothing else works, to terminate the toxic employee. What they are doing, however, is letting the process take longer than it should. The damage to other employees, to the corporate culture, and to the business itself, is clear. An organization's culture and its values will not be respected if they're not lived by on a day to day basis. Further, the actual cost of attrition, of training and coaching, and of employee

disengagement and low performance can easily have a significant impact on the company's bottom line. What appears to be holding many companies back is the fear that a destructive employee will sue; but as can be seen, litigation goes both ways and the company may have as much to fear from knowingly harboring a toxic manager as it was from terminating too quickly.

The research here also shows that companies cannot assume immunity from hiring destructive individuals. They are likely to work anywhere, at any time. Advance preparation, knowing what you will do, will help Human Resources and the management be ready to recognize the problem and be prepared to address it. While the respondents to this study were self-selected and most likely chose to respond because they had experience with such an issue, the respondent sample is geographically diverse enough, and the different companies represented varied enough, to conclude that almost no organization can expect to avoid dealing with toxic personalities at some point.

Having a destructive manager on staff is no shame; it can and does happen to any organization. But having a destructive manager on staff and failing to deal with him or her promptly and decisively will damage the company and its other employees. Companies would do well to recognize this, determine what their values truly are, develop processes that will enforce behavior in line with those values, and develop the spinal fortitude to make it happen.

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**Appendix A: IRB Application**

**IRB Application Form**

**SCU REQUEST FOR THE APPROVAL  
FOR THE USE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS IN RESEARCH  
2011-2012 APPLICATION FORM**

**APPLICATION DATA**

**Date of application: 3 July 2012**

**Indicate type of review:  Exempt  Expedited  Full**

**For all exempt reviews, indicate which of the following categories apply:**

- 1. Normal Educational Practices
- 2. Educational Tests
- 3. Survey/Interview Procedures
- 4. Observation
- 5. Secondary Use of Data
- 6. Evaluation of Federal Research/Programs
- 7. Taste Tests

**APPLICANT DATA**

**Investigator name(s): Mary Featherston**

**Project Title: Effective Processes for Dealing With Destructive Managers**

**Advisor: Martha Hardesty**

**Program: Organizational Leadership**

**Dates of Project: June – November 2012**

**Has this research been reviewed by another IRB?  Yes  No**

**Will this research be reviewed by another IRB?  Yes  No**

## **ABSTRACT**

**Research Question:** what policies and processes should companies follow when dealing with toxic managerial behavior?

**Methodology:** I intend to take a two-stage approach to my research. The first stage will be a survey which I would ask local members of a professional organization focusing on Human Resources (e.g., Society for Human Resource Management or National Human Resources Association) to fill out. The informed consent agreement would include the option of providing names and contact information for individuals who would be willing to discuss this in further detail. The second part of the research would be individual interviews with those who were willing to participate.

The survey will be designed to discover first, what processes and policies the respondents' organizations follow when dealing with toxic managers and second, whether, in the opinions of the respondents, these are effective, and what would the HR professionals prefer as an alternate protocol? Embedded in the survey will be a consent agreement which includes the option for the respondents of providing their names and contact info if they would be willing to participate in in-depth interviews to follow. This will be distributed to Human Resources professionals via SurveyMonkey.

My second step will be to analyze the survey responses to discover what seems to be the most common way of dealing with toxic managerial behavior, what seems to be the most effective, and what the basis for the policies appears to be – how do companies evaluate their managers' behavior, and what is the ethical basis for such evaluations?

The third step will be to develop an interview protocol and questions that will permit going into further detail with those who are willing to participate, and to interview five or more HR managers to gain an additional level of detail. As a counterpoint to the Human Resources perspective, I will also interview non-HR managers with the same protocol and questions, to gain insight into how different the impact of destructive managerial behavior looks to other managers versus HR professionals. The interview subjects for non-HR interviews will be drawn from the ranks of MAOL students and alumni, narrowed to those with five or more years of management experience to obtain the most seasoned responses from experienced managers. Additionally, I will limit interviews to employees of companies with 50 or more employees, as smaller companies often lack structure around their HR policies, and because there is less legal oversight over smaller companies.

The interview transcripts will be evaluated and the data thus obtained integrated into a coherent statement of current practices, what seems to work and what does not, and a summary of what can be concluded from the survey and the interviews.

Based on what I learn from this study I will develop a proposal which will provide a way for organizations to evaluate their options and weigh their priorities, balancing the ethical responsibilities that the organization has to the employee (the destructive manager), to its other employees and teams, and to the company's ability to maintain its culture and run its business effectively.

## **SUBJECTS AND RECRUITMENT**

**Age Range of Subjects:** 30 - 65

**Number:**      Male      Female 60 Total

**Describe how you will recruit your subjects: be specific. Attach a copy of any advertisement, flyer, letter, or statement that you will use to recruit subjects.** Members of the HR professional organization will be sent an email requesting their participation via an online survey (see attached letter). Interview subjects will be chosen from those survey respondents who have expressed their willingness to be interviewed in the body of the survey. Additional interview subjects will be sent an email asking for their participation (see second letter, attached); this second group of subjects will be drawn from MAOL students and alumni.

**Will the subjects be offered inducements for participation?** No.

**Please clearly identify any special populations or classes of subjects that you will include and provide a rationale for using them.**

The survey will be sent to HR professionals only, by asking permission of one or both of the Society for Human Resource Management or the National Human Resources Association. These organizations' members are being chosen in order to obtain as broad a group of subjects as possible while keeping the survey to local (Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN) businesses and to HR professionals. The use of local businesses is practical, since my hearing is poor enough that I cannot count on effective interviews over the phone and must therefore hold them all in person; the restriction to HR professionals only is to obtain accurate data about HR policies and practices used by the respondents' companies.

The second set of respondents will be non-HR managers, of 5 or more years' managerial experience and employment in organizations of more than 50 employees. These will be drawn from the MAOL student body and alumni. The use of MAOL students and alumni is a convenience sample which will provide an accessible population with a known level of professional experience.

## **RISKS AND BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION**

**Check all that apply. Does the research involve:**



- Use of private records (medical or educational records)
- Possible invasion of privacy of the subjects and/or their family
- Manipulation of psychological or social variables
- Probing for personal or sensitive information in surveys or interviews
- Use of deception
- Presentation of materials which subjects might consider offensive, threatening or degrading
- Risk of physical injury to subjects
- Other risks

**If any of these are checked, describe the precautions taken to minimize the risks.**

No respondents will be identified by name; their responses will be kept separate from their identities at all times.

**List any anticipated direct benefits to your subjects. If none, state that here and in the consent form.** None.

**Justify the statement that the potential benefits of this research study outweigh any probable risks.**

Risks to individuals are minimal. Their names and their organizations will be kept confidential and will not be published in the resulting paper or in any of the data.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY OF DATA**

**How will you maintain confidentiality of the information obtained from your subjects?**

Respondents' names and the names of their organizations will not be linked with their responses in the paper or in any published data.

**Where will the data be kept, how long will it be kept, and who will have access to it?**

The data will be retained primarily in electronic format. Interview notes will be transcribed and saved only on the researcher's computer hard drive; this computer is not part of a network and is not accessible to anyone else. Interview notes and other physical forms of data will be destroyed after being transcribed. Electronic data will be destroyed after completion of the study – by the end of December, 2012.

**Will data identifying subjects be made available to anyone other than you or your advisor? Who?** No.

**Will the data become a part of the medical or school record? If yes, explain.** No.

## **INFORMED CONSENT**

**How will you gain consent? State what you will say to the subjects to explain your research. Attach consent form or text of oral statement.** (*Note: if you propose to work with children ages 7-18 and you are gaining consent from their parents, you must also develop and attach an age-appropriate assent form.*)

The research will be described as a study into the practices used by companies to deal with the impact of destructive managerial behavior. The form will include a statement that specific data will not be linked to individual respondents or their employers. (See attached form)

**When will you obtain consent (that day?, several days before the project?, a week before?)?** Consent for the survey will be obtained online at the start of the survey; those who do not check the consent box will not continue with the survey. Consent for interviews will be obtained on the day of the interview.

**How will you assess that the subject understands what he/she has been asked to do?** All survey respondents and interview subjects will be adult professionals fully capable of understanding the intent of the study and the confidentiality steps taken to protect them.

## **ASSURANCES AND SIGNATURES**

**The signatures below certify that:**

- The information furnished concerning the procedures to be taken for the protection of human subjects is correct.
- The investigator, to the best of his/her knowledge, is complying with Federal regulations governing human subjects in research.
- The investigator will seek and obtain prior written approval from the Committee for any substantive modification in the proposal, including, but not limited to changes in cooperating investigators, procedures and subject population.
- The investigator will promptly report in writing to the Committee any unexpected or otherwise significant adverse events that occur in the course of the study.
- The investigator will promptly report in writing to the Committee and to the subjects any significant findings which develop during the course of the study which may affect the risks and benefits to the subjects who participate in the study.
- The research will not be initiated until the Committee provides written approval.
- The term of approval will be for one year. To extend the study beyond that term, a new application must be submitted.
- The research, once approved, is subject to continuing review and approval by the Committee.
- The researcher will comply with all requests from the IRB to report on the status of the study and will maintain records of the research according to IRB guidelines.
- If these conditions are not met, approval of this research may be suspended.

**Note: Approval of your final proposal indicates that your advisor and instructor have signed off on the IRB at the departmental level. Therefore you do not need the following signatures on this form unless you need to send it on to the university review board.**

**As primary investigator, I understand and will follow the above conditions.**

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Signature of Investigator

Date

**As Advisor or Sponsor, I assume responsibility for ensuring that the investigator complies with University and federal regulations regarding the use of Human Subjects in research.**

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Signature of Advisor or Sponsor

Date

(Student investigators must have an advisor. Staff and non-SCU applicants must have a departmental sponsor)

**As Program Director, I acknowledge that this research is in keeping with the standards set by our program and assure that the investigator has met all program requirements for review and approval of this research.**

---

Signature of Program Director

Date

## IRB Consent Form Checklist

Excerpted from Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects as published in the Federal Register Tuesday, June 18, 1991 and including 45 CFR 46.116:

No investigator may involve a human being as a subject in research covered by these criteria unless the investigator has obtained the legally effective informed consent of the subject or the subject's legally authorized representative. An investigator shall seek such consent only under circumstances that provide the prospective subject or the representative sufficient opportunity to consider whether or not to participate and that minimize the possibility of coercion or undue influence. The information that the researcher prepares in a consent form must use language that is understandable to the subject or the representative. No informed consent may include any language which indicates that the subject has waived or implies waiver of any legal rights, releases or appears to release the investigator, the sponsor or the institution or its agents from liability for negligence.

Follow the format in the sample consent form and use the following checklist to ensure that all elements of informed consent are included:

- A statement that the study involves research.
- For student research, a statement that the study is being undertaken by students under the supervision of a faculty member. The name of the department should be indicated as well as the name of the faculty member.
- An explanation of the purposes of the research.
- The duration of the subject's participation.
- The number of subjects involved in the research.
- A step by step description of the procedures to be used.
- A description of the expected or foreseeable risks or discomforts to the subject.
- A description of any benefits to the subject or to others which may reasonably be expected from the research.
- A disclosure of appropriate alternative procedures or courses of treatment, if any, that might be advantageous to the subject.
- A description of the measures that the researcher will follow to assure confidentiality of records that identify each subject by name and/or identification number.
- An explanation of how to contact the researcher and the sponsor for questions about the study.
- If physical contact is involved, an explanation of whom to contact regarding the research, the subject's rights, and research-related injury.
- A statement that the subject is free to choose to participate in the study, and that by refusing to participate, the subject will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which the subject may otherwise be entitled.
- A statement that clearly indicates that the subject may discontinue participation at any time, even after the consent form is signed, without any loss of benefits.
- A statement indicating that the subject will be offered a copy of the form to keep.
- A line for the signature of the subject followed by the date (do not make an "x" to show where to sign)
- A line for the signature of the investigator followed by the date of the signing

## **Appendix B: Survey Instrument**

You are invited to participate in a research study investigating how companies deal with the impact of destructive managerial behavior. This study is being conducted by Mary Featherston, a graduate student at St. Catherine University under the supervision of Martha Hardesty PhD, a faculty member in the Master of Arts in Organizational Leadership program. You were selected as a possible participant in this research because you are an HR professional with knowledge about how your organization manages such employees.

The purpose of this study is to learn what companies currently do to deal with the effects of destructive managerial behavior, how effective those practices are, and what might be done instead that would help minimize the impact on other employees and on the company.

If you decide to participate, please continue to page two and complete the survey. The questions are designed to elicit data about how you and your company currently deal with toxic behavior and whether, in your opinion, the practices followed in your organization are effective. This survey should not take more than 30-45 minutes to complete.

The study has minimal risk for respondents. First, neither interview subjects or their organizations will be identified in the resulting paper or data sets. Second, the respondents may choose to terminate the interview at any time by simply opting out of the survey.

There are no direct benefits to participants for being part of this study.

Any information obtained in connection with this research study that can be identified with you will be disclosed only with your permission; your results will be kept confidential. In any written reports or publications, no one will be identified or identifiable and only group data will be presented.

I will keep the research results in electronic form only, and only I and my advisor will have access to the records while I work on this project.

Participation in this research study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with St. Catherine University in any way. If you decide to participate, you are free to stop at any time without affecting these relationships.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me, Mary Featherston, at [mlfeatherston@skate.edu](mailto:mlfeatherston@skate.edu). You may ask questions now, or if you have any additional questions later, the faculty advisor, Martha Hardesty ph 651-428-2347, will be happy to answer them. If you have other questions or concerns regarding the study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you may also contact the faculty advisor.

You are making a decision whether or not to participate. By clicking on the “Yes” answer to this question, you are agreeing that you have read this question and agree to participate in the study. If you wish to withdraw from the study you may stop filling out the survey before completing it.

Do you wish to participate in this study: Yes No

The questions on this survey will refer to the following scenario:

Companies often hire managers based on subject-matter expertise. What can happen is that people who are hired lack the empathy or interpersonal skills to manage people effectively, or they indulge in abusive or contemptuous behaviors towards their subordinates or others in the company, thus creating an atmosphere of fear, unpleasant working conditions, and damage to the corporate culture and even the company's business.

The questions in this survey are designed to learn how your company deals with such managers. Please refer to this definition of destructive/toxic managerial behavior when you answer the questions:

“the systematic and repeated behavior by a leader or manager that undermines the interests of the organization by sabotaging the organization's goals, tasks, resources, and effectiveness and/or the motivation, well-being or job satisfaction of his/her subordinates”. (From Einarsen, Aasland, and Skogstad, 2007)

- 1 Has your company ever hired a destructive, or toxic manager? Yes No
- 2 Were you prepared to deal with the outcome of destructive behaviors? Yes No
- 3 How long did it take for you to recognize that this person's behavior was destructive?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 4 How long did it take for others to recognize that this person's behavior was destructive?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 5 How was the toxic manager dealt with by your company? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 6 What was effective about what was done to deal with the situation?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 7 What was ineffective about what was done to deal with the situation?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 8 What could have been done to improve management of this person?  
\_\_\_\_\_

- 9 If employees come to H.R. about an abusive manager, how is this input accepted and dealt with? \_\_\_\_\_
- 10 How much repeated destructive behavior was required to have been observed before H.R. felt that it was appropriate to act?
- 11 Do you believe that employees have ever failed to come to H.R. about their manager's behavior due to fear of reprisal? Yes No
- 12 If a new manager begins to exhibit abusive behavior, what steps are taken to address it?
- 13 How quickly is any attempt at dealing with abusive managerial behavior initiated?  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Within 3 months \_\_\_\_\_ Within 6 months \_\_\_\_\_ within a year
- 14 Do the managers of the abusive employees have the latitude to decide to overlook abusive behaviors? Yes No
- 15 Does HR have the latitude to decide to ignore such behavior? Yes No
- 16 If the performance evaluation system is the tool used to deal with abusive managerial behavior, how much time passes before the new manager's first performance evaluation? 3 months 6 months 1 year Other: \_\_\_\_
- 17 Does your company have any system for closer oversight of newly-hired managers (as compared to current, established managers)?
- 18 How does your company react to complaints about a manager by an employee?
- 19 How does your company react to complaints about a manager by multiple employees?
- 20 How does your company's approach to dealing with destructive behaviors serve the destructive employee?
- 21 How does your company's approach to dealing with destructive behaviors serve the other employees of the company?
- 22 How does your company's approach to dealing with destructive behaviors serve the work environment?
- 23 How does your company's approach to dealing with destructive behaviors serve the corporate culture?

- 24 How does your company's approach to dealing with destructive behaviors serve the organization's business interests?
- 25 In your opinion, where does the balance tip between giving the new manager a fair chance to fit in and not making other employees absorb undue destructive behavior?
- 26 Where, in your opinion, does the balance tip between fairness to the new manager and responsibility to the corporate culture?
- 27 Where, in your opinion, does the balance tip between fairness to the new manager and keeping a healthy workplace environment?
- 28 Is there a fairness issue to be balanced between the employees or team and the corporate culture?
- 29 Is there a fairness issue to be balanced between the employees or team and the organization's business?
- 30 Rank these three in order of importance:
- Individual employees
  - The employees as a group
  - The work environment and corporate culture
- 31 What could your company do better in dealing with destructive managers?
- Processes
  - Development of values/ethical basis for evaluation?
  - Timing – how quickly was the problem addressed?
  - How much can or should be shared with employees who feel abused?
  - How many opportunities should destructive managers be given to change?

Other comments that you may have:

Thank you for your participation. Your input is valuable. I would like to follow this survey with in-depth interviews of 5 or more HR professionals. If you would be willing to be interviewed as part of this study, please leave your e-mail address or phone number and your name here:

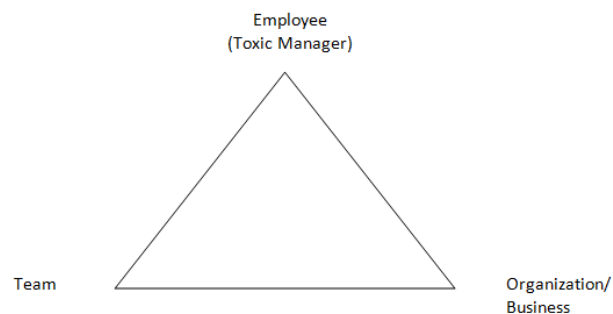
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## Appendix C: Interview Protocol

**Definition of a destructive manager:** “the systematic and repeated behavior by a leader or manager that undermines the interests of the organization by sabotaging the organization’s goals, tasks, resources, and effectiveness and/or the motivation, well-being or job satisfaction of his/her subordinates”. (From Einarsen, Aasland, and Skogstad, 2007)

- 1 **Have you ever worked with a destructive manager? Please tell me what happened.**
- 2 **How long did it take for your company to recognize what it was dealing with?**
- 3 **What do you think your company did right?**
- 4 **What do you think your company did wrong?**
- 5 **What might have been done differently?**
- 6 **Do you think that the damage done to the company or to others had a greater impact than the potential impact on the new (destructive) manager? How would you balance this triangle:**



- 7 **What should HR’s primary concern be?**

**8 What should other managers' primary concern be?**

**9 Do you have any other comments to add?**

## **Appendix D: Interview Consent Form**

### **Information and Consent Form**

#### **Effective Processes for Dealing With Dysfunctional Managers (Interviews)**

##### **Introduction:**

You are invited to participate in a research study investigating how companies deal with the impact of destructive managerial behavior. This study is being conducted by Mary Featherston, a graduate student at St. Catherine University under the supervision of Martha Hardesty, PhD, a faculty member in the Master of Arts in Organizational Leadership program. You were selected as a possible participant in this research because you are an experienced manager who has experienced the effects of such behavior. Please read this form and ask questions before you agree to be in the study.

##### **Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to learn what companies currently do to deal with the effects of destructive managerial behavior, how effective those practices are, and what might be done instead that would help minimize the impact on other employees and on the company.

##### **Procedures:**

If you decide to participate, you will be interviewed in person by the researcher. The questions are designed to elicit data about how you and your company currently deal with toxic behavior and whether, in your opinion, the practices followed in your organization are effective. This study will take approximately 2-3 hours over one or two sessions.

##### **Risks and Benefits of being in the study:**

The study has minimal risk for respondents. First, neither interview subjects or their organizations will be identified in the resulting paper or data sets. Second, the respondents may choose to terminate the interview at any time by simply stating so to the interviewer.

There are no direct benefits to participants for being part of this study.

##### **Confidentiality:**

Any information obtained in connection with this research study that can be identified with you will be disclosed only with your permission; your results will be kept confidential. In any written reports or publications, no one will be identified or identifiable and only group data will be presented.

I will keep the research results in electronic form only, and only I and my advisor will have access to the records while I work on this project. I will finish analyzing the data by September 15, 2012. When the study has been completed, all original reports and identifying information that can be linked back to you will be destroyed.

**Voluntary nature of the study:**

Participation in this research study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with St. Catherine University in any way. If you decide to participate, you are free to stop at any time without affecting these relationships.

**Contacts and questions:**

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me, Mary Featherston, at [mlfeatherston@stkate.edu](mailto:mlfeatherston@stkate.edu). You may ask questions now, or if you have any additional questions later, the faculty advisor, Martha Hardesty, ph 651-428-2347, will be happy to answer them. If you have other questions or concerns regarding the study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you may also contact the faculty advisor.

You may keep a copy of this form for your records.

**Statement of Consent:**

You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that you have read this information and your questions have been answered. Even after signing this form, please know that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

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I consent to participate in the study and agree to be recorded.

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Signature of Participant

Date