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**TOXIC LEADERSHIP: UNDERSTANDING AND MITIGATING THE THREAT**

**By Major Jason Thompson**

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CANADIAN FORCES COLLEGE – COLLÈGE DES FORCES CANADIENNES

JCSP 47 – PCEMI 47
2020 – 2021

SOLO FLIGHT

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> *A true leader has the confidence to stand alone, the courage to make tough decisions, and the compassion to listen to the needs of others. He does not set out to be a leader, but becomes one by the equality of his actions and the integrity of his intent.*

-General Douglas MacArthur, US Army

**INTRODUCTION**

Effective leadership is essential to the long-term health and enduring success of all organizations. This is true across all domains to include private businesses, public agencies, and community establishments. Leaders deliver the vision and guidance to activate resources, labour, and effort to realize outcomes. The leader's influence, expertise, and personal example set the conditions to inspire, direct, and shield the organization and its members as they take action to achieve objectives. And although leadership is universally applicable, the primacy of effective leadership is most apparent in the military domain where the operational conditions, risks, and consequences can be extreme. For military operations to succeed while preserving organizational health, the relationship between leaders and followers must be based on trust and respect. Notwithstanding the impact of modern technology on contemporary military operations, the human element of leadership continues to be central to enabling action, and risk acceptance, in volatile and uncertain environments.

Unfortunately, however, despite the centrality of effective leadership and the enormous effort that military and civilian organizations place on recruiting, selecting, and training leaders, they continue to be susceptible to the anti-social, narcissistic, and damaging effects of toxic leaders. The human element of leadership within an organization, specifically the need for resource control, risk calculation, and performance, create the conditions that allow toxic leaders to survive, and in some cases, thrive. Although toxic leadership is not a new phenomenon, recent research indicates that its impacts pose a significant risk to long-term organizational health and

performance. To address this risk, it is paramount that senior leaders understand what it is, how it manifests, and what can be done to proactively counter it.

This essay will define toxic leadership and outline a few of the attributes and archetypes that characterize it. Next, it will explore the reasons why organizations tolerate toxic behaviours and summarize a few of the challenges that senior military leaders have addressing it. This will be followed by a section on the impacts of toxic leadership and its far-reaching organizational consequences. This will be reinforced with a few contemporary examples to highlight the scope of the issue. Lastly, the essay will conclude with potential mitigation strategies and actions that are being taken within a few military organizations to address the risk.

## DEFINING TOXIC LEADERSHIP

"Toxic leadership is a multidimensional construct…of abusive supervision along with narcissism, authoritarianism, self-promotion, and unpredictability. Other [definitions] include self-aggrandizement, pettiness, indifference to [norms], and interpersonal malice."[1] Toxic leaders exhibit dysfunctional personal qualities and destructive behaviours that "…concoct a deadly brew of significant and sustained injury."[2] Colonel George Reed identified three key elements of a toxic leader: "An apparent lack of concern for the well-being of subordinates. A personality or interpersonal technique that negatively affects organizational climate. [And] a conviction by subordinates that the leader is motivated primarily by self-interest."[3] Toxic leaders tend to be high performers with a record of visible, short-term achievements. Those achievements however

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[1] James M Dobbs, James J. Do, "The Impact of Perceived Toxic Leadership on Cynicism in Officer Candidates," *Armed Forces and & Society*, Vol 45 (I), 2018, page 6.

[2] Howard Schwartz, "Chapter 73: Toxic Leadership," *Political and Civic Leadership: A Reference Handbook,* November 01, 2010.

[3] George E. Reed, "Toxic Leadership," Military Review, July/August 2004, page 67.

come at the expense of long-term organizational health. This concept was clearly articulated by Colonel Reed when he stated that "…toxic leaders rise to their stations in life over the carcasses of those who work for them. They run their units into the ground, casting a wake that is obvious to those who assume leadership positions behind them."[4]

Toxic leaders are the result of biological and environmental factors. Research indicates that many "…toxic leaders…had poor role models [and] they operate under a faulty definition of leadership. Often, they are vocal advocates of strong leadership, but they have a distorted definition of strength…not realizing that overcontrolling produces toxic effects."[5] The same research indicates that toxic leaders may have "…unresolved psychological issues such as fear of the unknown, fear of failure, mistrust of people, feelings of inadequacy, lack of confidence or extreme overconfidence."[6] Disturbingly, a 2005 study of senior executives "…revealed that a number of psychopathic attributes were arguably more common in the boardroom than the padded cell: notably superficial charm, egocentricity, independence and restricted focus."[7] The same publication stated that "…an absence of emotion in decision making, a cold focus on outcomes, an extremely ruthless and egocentric logic…tend to show up in disproportionate degrees in [high performing professionals and psychopaths]."[8]

[4] George E. Reed, "Toxic Leadership," Military Review, July/August 2004, page 68.

[5] Gary L. Winn, Ava C. Dykes, "Identifying Toxic Leadership & Building Worker Resilience," *Professional Safety Journal,* March 2019, page 40.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Tim Adams, "The Wisdom of Psychopaths by Kevin Dutton – Review," *The Guardian,* accessed on 12 April 2021 at: https://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/oct/07/wisdom-of-psychopaths-kevin-dutton-review

[8] Ibid.

Toxic leaders do not operate in isolation and it is important to understand the environmental context that produces or enables their behaviour. To address this gap, researchers developed a multi-dimensional model named the *Toxic Triangle* to characterize "…the confluence of leader, follower, and environmental factors that make destructive leadership possible."[9] Most literature on toxic leadership correctly focuses on the leader and their destructive personal attributes. However, without an enabling environment and complicit subordinates, their toxicity would be limited. Environmental risk factors include volatility, perceived threats, and poor institutional policies and cultural values. Conversely, subordinates that enable toxicity are categorized as either conformers or colluders, each seeking to endure or exploit the situation without directly confronting the toxic leader.[10] Dr Howard Schwartz, an expert on the psychodynamics of organizations stated that "…because [toxic leaders have the potential to] soothe our anxieties and fears, we often succumb to these dangerous leaders who manipulate our yearnings for safety, significance, heroism, and immortality."[11]

It is important to note that not all bad leaders are necessarily toxic. Poor leadership exists on a spectrum, ranging from ineffective leaders who lack initiative and expertise, to truly destructive leaders who engage in damaging and potentially illegal behaviour. What separates toxic leaders from bad leaders is their intent to pursue narcissistic, selfish, or counter-cultural aims at the expense of the organization that they are leading.[12] "Intention is a critical part of

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[9] Teresa O'Hara, "Toxic Leadership," *Wily Encyclopedia of Management*, 2014, page 2.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Howard Schwartz, "Chapter 73: Toxic Leadership," *Political and Civic Leadership: A Reference Handbook,* November 01, 2010.

[12] Ivana Milosevic, Stefan Maric, and Dragan Loncar, "Defeating the Toxic Boss: The Nature of Toxic Leadership and the Role of Followers," *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, Vol. 27(2), 2020, page 131-132.

being classified as a toxic leader...[appreciating that] leaders who are careless or unaware of the negative consequences of their actions may not necessarily be classified as toxic."[13] This does not discount the harmful effects of incompetent or ineffective leaders. Clearly those types of leaders need to be addressed, but systems exist in most organizations to identify and resolve those situations. Toxic leaders with malicious intent, however, can be much more difficult to identify and mitigate. Ultimately, this serves to highlight the critical importance of understanding toxic leadership and how it manifests within organizations.

## TOLERATING TOXIC LEADERSHIP

Organizations endure toxic leadership for a wide variety of reasons. First, identifying and resolving toxic behaviour can be extremely challenging. Toxic leaders wage a campaign of "…downward and upward influence attempts that create toxic contexts. Downward influence attempts entail the creation of obstacles that interfere with the followers' ability to perform their tasks. [And] upward influence [to] obstruct supervisors' ability to evaluate leader's competence."[14] As a result, unless an observer is directly within a leader's sphere of influence, it can be difficult to detect. Secondly, there is a contradiction between stated expectations and actual outcomes. "There's a tendency to assume that we want our leaders to be encouraging, magnanimous, and optimistic. But in the last decade…we've been seeing an increasing number of leaders better known for a style that is more vitriolic, punitive, and negative."[15] Counter to

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[13] Teresa O'Hara, "Toxic Leadership," *Wily Encyclopedia of Management*, 2014, page 1.

[14] Ivana Milosevic, Stefan Maric, and Dragan Loncar, "Defeating the Toxic Boss: The Nature of Toxic Leadership and the Role of Followers," *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, Vol. 27(2), 2020, page 132.

[15] Eileen Chou, "Why We're Drawn to Leaders Who Emphasize the Negative," *Harvard Business Review,* January 03, 2019, assessed on 12 April 2021 at: https://hbr.org/2019/01/why-were-drawn-to-leaders-who-emphasize-the-negative

preconceived notions that organizations actively seek positive and optimistic leaders for senior positions, organizations tend to empower naysayers and pessimists instead. "[By] actively criticizing, negating, or refuting another person or entity, naysayers [are] perceived as acting…according to their own agency — a key determinant of power."[16]

Leadership in the military context is slightly different than more traditional organizations. Clearly, universality of service and unlimited liability magnify the consequences of poor leadership in the military. However, less extreme but no less important factors such as environmental conditions, austerity, time, and risk also serve to separate military service from most other professions. "Military culture rewards physical and mental toughness, competition, and aggression but it is not clear whether there is a tipping point at which time the behavioral manifestation of such values become toxic."[17] Situationally appropriate leadership styles can be difficult to develop, and as a fighting organization it can be challenging to train, assess, and critique those styles across the entire spectrum of military activities and operations.

Another factor that allows toxic leadership to survive in the military is the concept of 'masculine contest culture'. A study published in the *Journal of Social Issues* stated that "…masculinity contest cultures create the conditions for toxic leadership to thrive, which, in turn, contributes to greater…conflict, stress, and intent to leave."[18] The general concept is that in masculine contest cultures employees will be reluctant to raise issues or complain for fear of

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[16] Eileen Chou, "Why We're Drawn to Leaders Who Emphasize the Negative," *Harvard Business Review,* January 03, 2019, assessed on 12 April 2021 at: https://hbr.org/2019/01/why-were-drawn-to-leaders-who-emphasize-the-negative

[17] Jessica A. Gallus, Benjamin M. Walsh, Marinus van Driel, Melissa C. Gouge & Emily Antolic, "Intolerable Cruelty: A Multilevel Examination of the Impact of Toxic Leadership on U.S. Military Units and Service Members," *Military Psychology,* 25:6, 2013, page 599.

[18] Kenneth Matos, Olivia (Mandy) O'Neill, Xue Lei, "Toxic Leadership and the Masculinity Contest Culture: How 'Win or Die' Cultures Breed Abusive Leadership," *Journal of Social Issues,* Vol. 74, No. 3. 2018, page 524.

being viewed as weak or working against the in-group. This creates space for toxic leaders to continue their destructive behaviour relatively unchecked because the group is unlikely to address it. These conditions are especially dangerous for an organization over the long term because "…ignoring toxic leadership could result in a long-term suppression of reports of abusive behavior followed by explosive revelations when external events undermine employee attempts at rationalizing their experiences."[19]

An article from the *Airforce Times* highlighted a more sinister explanation for the reluctance to address toxic leadership by stating that it "…comes down to three major factors: individual competence of the toxic officer; lack of personal accountability up and down the chain of command; and senior leader fear of loss of confidence."[20] This explanation aligns with other studies that indicate very senior leaders tolerate or promote toxic leaders for factors other than organizational health. Literature from the private sector states "…many people easily forgive these toxic leaders and the harm they cause because they measure their success solely in financial terms or because they bring [short term] value to the organization."[21] Military organizations are not typically concerned with financial performance; they are however driven by operational metrics and outcomes. And when those outcomes are tied to national strategic interests, it becomes clear why senior leaders may tolerate toxic leaders to achieve no-fail, high consequence objectives. Maintaining the confidence of government is also

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[19] Kenneth Matos, Olivia (Mandy) O'Neill, Xue Lei, "Toxic Leadership and the Masculinity Contest Culture: How 'Win or Die' Cultures Breed Abusive Leadership," *Journal of Social Issues,* Vol. 74, No. 3. 2018, page 522.

[20] Jason Lamb, "Why toxic senior leaders survive – and sometimes thrive – in the military," *Airforce Times,* September 4, 2020, accessed on 12 April 2021 at: https://www.airforcetimes.com/opinion/commentary/2020/09/04/why-toxic-senior-leaders-survive-and-sometimes-thrive-in-the-military/

[21] Lucia Ovidia Vreja, Sergiu Balan, Loredana Cornelia Bosca, "An Evolutionary Perspective on Toxic Leadership," *Management and Economics Review,* Volume 1, Issue 2, 2016, page 225.

an extremely important factor for senior military leaders; preserving civil-military relationships so that elected officials trust their military leaders to achieve defence policy goals is crucial. For individual senior leaders however, personal credibility is also a critical barrier to rooting out toxicity. If a senior leader vouches for a subordinate, and that person proves to be undesirable due to poor performance, that senior leader risks losing credibility. In this instance, the senior leader must decide between admitting a mistake or protecting long-term organizational health. Given some of the research on the narcissistic tendencies of very senior leaders and high-performers, altruistic behaviour is not always guaranteed.

**ORGANIZATIONAL IMPACTS OF TOXIC LEADERSHIP**

Lee Simmons from the Stanford Graduate School of Business states that because narcissistic toxic leaders "… are fundamentally driven by their own self-interest, lack empathy, and are less constrained by ethical standards, they can cause tremendous harm once in power and can even put the organizations they lead at risk."[22] Toxic leaders diminish organizational performance, lower morale, reduce commitment and loyalty, and cause reputational damages.[23] The *Stress and Health Journal* indicates that victims of toxic leadership have physical and psychological symptoms, including "…self-doubt, feeling highly stressed, anxious, mistrust, anger, and fear…[as well as increased incidence of] colds, gastric upset, hair loss, skin rashes, headaches, weight gain/loss, and insomnia."[24]

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[22] Lee Simmons, "How Narcissistic Leaders Destroy from Within," *Stanford Graduate School of Business,* April 30, 2020, accessed on 12 April 2021 at: https://www.gsb.stanford.edu/insights/how-narcissistic-leaders-destroy-within

[23] Lucia Ovidia Vreja, Sergiu Balan, Loredana Cornelia Bosca, "An Evolutionary Perspective on Toxic Leadership," *Management and Economics Review,* Volume 1, Issue 2, 2016, page 225.

[24] Vicki Webster, Paula Brough, Kathleen Daly, "Fight, Flight or Freeze: Common Responses for Follower Coping with Toxic Leadership," *Stress and Health,* 2016, page 348.

From an organizational health perspective, the data clearly demonstrates the negative impact of toxic leaders. "The results of statistical analysis show that there is a significant and positive relation between toxic leadership perception and intention to leave of employees."[25] In the US Army, a survey found that "…61% of mid-grade officers (n = 167) …considered leaving their profession because of the way they were treated by their supervisor."[26] Beyond recruiting and retention concerns, toxic leadership also has a long-term impact on organizational health because it codifies and reinforces negative behaviour among junior leaders, magnifying the impact of negative leaders over time. "According to social learning theory, people learn vicariously by observing others' behaviour …this implies that when…corporate psychopaths are present then toxic behaviour…will be magnified as it is learnt, repeated and copied."[27]

For professional military forces, understanding the impacts of toxic leadership is particularly important because a recent study of soldiers in a combat zone found that "…those who experienced [toxic leadership] identified less with the organization's core values and demonstrated lower levels of moral courage."[28] The same research found that toxic leadership "…[undermined] moral agency and negatively impacted ethical behavior. Furthermore, those in

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[25] Meltem Akca, "The Impact of Toxic Leadership on Intention to Leave of Employees," *International Journal of Economics, Business and Management Research,* September 2017, p. 286, accessed on 12 April 2021 at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/321359212_The_Impact_of_Toxic_Leadership_on_Intention_to_Leave_of_Employees

[26] James M Dobbs, James J. Do, "The Impact of Perceived Toxic Leadership on Cynicism in Officer Candidates," *Armed Forces and & Society*, Vol 45 (I), 2018, page 7.

[27] Clive R. Boddy, "Corporate Psychopaths, Conflict, Employee Affective Well-Being and Counterproductive Work Behaviour," *Middlesex University Business School,* 20 November 2012, p. 108.

[28] James M Dobbs, James J. Do, "The Impact of Perceived Toxic Leadership on Cynicism in Officer Candidates," *Armed Forces and & Society*, Vol 45 (I), 2018, page 7.

organizations with higher levels of abusive supervision were less likely to report the ethical transgressions of others."[29]

One major indicator of the pervasiveness of toxic leadership is the presence of *cynicism* within an organization. A study conducted at the US Airforce Academy in 2018 demonstrated "…a positive relationship between toxic leadership and organizational cynicism."[30] Organizational cynicism is linked to a perceived gap between the espoused values of an organization and the actions and attitudes of leadership within that organization. If toxic leadership is permitted or encouraged in an organization, cynicism will correspondingly increase. This is important because "…organizational cynicism is a key factor in employee burnout, emotional exhaustion, and turnover and directly reduces organizational citizenship behavior, commitment, and effectiveness."[31] For the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF), this finding should be alarming. The 2019 CAF Retention Survey indicated that personnel have "…moderately high levels of organizational cynicism. In line with correlational analyses… [this negatively impacts] affective commitment and overall retention intentions."[32] The same survey also indicated that "…senior officers had the most favourable perceptions or attitudes, followed by senior non-commissioned, junior officers, and junior non-commissioned. This pattern emerged in responses to measures of decision authority, fairness, and cynicism."[33] This finding

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[29] James M Dobbs, James J. Do, "The Impact of Perceived Toxic Leadership on Cynicism in Officer Candidates," *Armed Forces and & Society*, Vol 45 (I), 2018, page 7.

[30] Ibid, page 3.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Edward Yeung, Evanya Musolina, "The 2019 CAF Regular Force Retention Survey," Defence Research and Development Canada, Department of National Defence, Ottawa, November 2019, page 8.

[33] Ibid, page VI.

does not necessarily imply that toxic leadership is a systemic issue for the CAF, however, it is an

alarming trend that warrants further investigation.

**EXAMPLES OF TOXIC LEADERSHIP**

Regrettably, examples of high-profile toxic leaders are plentiful. From Canada's

Governor General Julie Payette[34] to Enron's CEO Kenneth Lay[35], the list of senior leaders who

have exhibited destructive, narcissistic behaviour is long. To keep this essay focused on military

affairs, toxic leadership examples will be taken from the US Army. This is being done for two

reasons. First, the US Army has more publicly available research on this topic than most

militaries, and therefore it is expedient. And second, the examples highlighted below have no

connection to the Canadian Forces College, the CAF, or the Canadian Government, avoiding

potential conflicts for the author.

Like all organizations, the US Army is not immune to the effects of toxic leadership and

its adverse impacts. Research from 2018 "…found that more than 80% of U.S. Army officers

and sergeants 'had directly observed a toxic leader in the last year and that about 20 percent of

the respondents said that they had worked directly for one.'"[36] For example, Colonel Michael

Schoenfeldt, a brigade commander in the US Army's 1st Cavalry Division was relieved of

command for engaging in "…bullying...and counterproductive leadership as defined by [US

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[34] Privy Council Office, "Final Review Report," *Quintet Consulting Corporation*, 12 January 2021. Accessed on 18 April 2021 at: https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/20465633/release-copy-27-01-21_ocr-1.pdf

[35] Claire Suddath, "Top 10 CEO Scandals", *Time*, August 10, 2010, accessed on 12 April 2021 at: http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,2009445_2009447_2009502,00.html

[36] James M Dobbs, James J. Do, "The Impact of Perceived Toxic Leadership on Cynicism in Officer Candidates," *Armed Forces and & Society*, Vol 45 (I), 2018, page 7.

Army regulations]."[37] Interestingly, the investigation of Colonel Schoenfeldt did not reveal a performance failure. Instead, his shortcomings were assessed to have had a "…deleterious impact on the welfare of subordinates." For an organization like the US Army, which is focused on fighting and winning wars, deliberately focusing on human factors as opposed to technical performance metrics is a revealing indicator of progress. Also interesting is the fact that preceding the investigation of Colonel Schoenfeldt, Major-General Broadwater was suspended from his position as Commander of 1st Cavalry Division for "…the division's [negative] command climate and [sexual assault and sexual harassment] program."[38] Although the investigations have not been linked together according to publicly available information, this example highlights the possibility of senior toxic leaders negatively influencing the leadership style of more junior leaders.

More broadly, an *Army Times* article from 2015 indicated that 129 battalion and brigade commanders had been fired or relieved since 2003. Then Army Secretary John McHugh indicated that "…in addition to rooting out toxic leaders, the Army is also focused on picking the best leaders."[39] These examples are not intended to single out the US Army. The US Army is a highly competent fighting force, the envy of most military professionals around the world. These

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[37] Matthew Cox, "Army 1st Cavalry Division Brigade Commander Fired for Allegedly Bullying His Subordinates," *Military News,* 09 April 2021, accessed on 12 April 2021 at: https://www.military.com/daily-news/2021/04/09/army-1st-cavalry-division-brigade-commander-fired-allegedly-bullying-his-subordinates.html

[38] Matthew Cox, "Army 1st Cavalry Division Brigade Commander Fired for Allegedly Bullying His Subordinates," *Military News,* 09 April 2021, accessed on 12 April 2021 at: https://www.military.com/daily-news/2021/04/09/army-1st-cavalry-division-brigade-commander-fired-allegedly-bullying-his-subordinates.html

[39] Michelle Tan, "129 Army battalion, brigade commanders fired since 2003," *Army Times,* February 2, 2015, accessed on 12 April 2021 at: https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2015/02/02/129-army-battalion-brigade-commanders-fired-since-2003/

examples do however highlight the pervasiveness of toxic leadership and the critical importance of taking action to counter it.

**MITIGATION STRATEGIES**

A study from the Indiana Institute of Technology on the impacts of toxic leadership stated that "…toxic leadership is a global phenomenon and is a statistically relevant topic [that organizational leaders must address] …to maintain organizational efficiencies, create strong organizational climates, and develop global leaders of high performance and merit."[40] Within the US Military "…efforts to identify toxic leaders are witnessed through an increased use of 360-degree performance appraisals and climate surveys that capture subordinate perceptions of their leadership."[41] To be effective however, this must coincide with a cultural shift away from technical evaluations of a leader's ability to achieve the mission to include an assessment of their capacity to develop subordinates and apply situationally appropriate leadership styles. To achieve this, other assessment tools such as "…personality assessments, objective indicators of toxic leadership, and exit interviews…should be identified or created as additional means for determining who may be more inclined to engage in toxic behaviors."[42]

In complex leadership environments like the military, where a broad spectrum of techniques and styles are required to be effective, "…efforts to confront toxic leadership by simply offering employees mechanisms to report such behavior may be ineffective so long as

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[40] Kevin A. Fitzgibbons, "The Relationship Between Toxic Leadership and Organizational Climate: An investigation into the existence of toxic leadership within an organization and the effects those toxic elements have on organizational climate," *Indiana Institute of Technology,* May 2018, page 151.

[41] Jessica A. Gallus, Benjamin M. Walsh, Marinus van Driel, Melissa C. Gouge & Emily Antolic, "Intolerable Cruelty: A Multilevel Examination of the Impact of Toxic Leadership on U.S. Military Units and Service Members," *Military Psychology,* 25:6, 2013, page 597.

[42] Ibid.

[the realities of military service] remain in place."[43] In 2002 the Finnish Defence Force implemented a program to evaluate and remediate institutional shortcomings, ranging from unit-level command climate to organizational policies. "Under this system…Finland's military regularly polls soldiers throughout their service on matters such as…superiors' leadership, stress management, unit cohesion, and communications from central offices."[44] This model is interesting because it puts the onus on the institution to collect and analyze data, as opposed to a 'suggestion box' or 'hotline' method which requires soldiers to proactively disclose information. Critically, this program is not exclusively focused on morale and welfare. Instead, it is focused on discovering root causes of dissatisfaction and adjusting the system to improve commitment, cohesion, and attitudes towards military service. This institutional commitment to improvement has paid dividends and "…officers' leadership abilities have quickly improved thanks to the scheme. Although Finnish officers never treated their soldiers brutally, they mostly relied on their authority [to lead] …[however] success is now based on a mutual bond of trust."[45] This commitment to improvement and change has had a direct impact on attitudes within the Finnish Defence Force. "In a survey of conscripts conducted [in 2017], 66 percent rated their military service positively; in 2002, less than half did."[46]

Given that toxic leadership is associated with psychopathy, workplace conflict, and counterproductive work behaviours "…the arguments around the calls for the screening of

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[43] Kenneth Matos, Olivia (Mandy) O'Neill, Xue Lei, "Toxic Leadership and the Masculinity Contest Culture: How 'Win or Die' Cultures Breed Abusive Leadership," *Journal of Social Issues,* Vol. 74, No. 3. 2018, page 522.

[44] Elisabeth Braw, "The Finnish Model: To Improve Europe's Militaries, Look North," *Foreign Affairs*, October 9, 2017, accessed on 19 April 2021 at: https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/finland/2017-10-09/finnish-model

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid.

corporate psychopaths in senior positions within corporations are thereby strengthened."[47] And beyond proactive screening, to preserve institutional health "…[organizations] that wish to…minimize conflict and bullying will have to minimize their employment of corporate psychopaths or carefully manage their behaviour."[48] This recommendation implies that senior leaders and selection boards must proactively and routinely screen, assess, and remediate toxic leadership behaviour within their organization. Ultimately, this demands strong leadership and a willingness to counsel, retrain if necessary, and in some cases remove, senior leaders who fail to provide a healthy work environment.

**CONCLUSION**

Good leadership is pivotal to the long-term health and optimal performance of all organizations. It is the key factor that mobilizes resources and human capital to enthusiastically achieve objectives. Toxic leadership, however, is a menacing and pervasive threat that is difficult to detect and has the potential to destroy cohesion, morale, commitment, and performance. For military organizations where the operating environment and consequences of failure can be extreme, effective leadership is paramount. Consequently, it is vital that senior leaders understand toxic leadership, how it manifests, and actively guard against its adverse impacts to preserve the institutional health and fighting capacity of their formations and commands.

> *You have to lead men in war by requiring more from the individual than he thinks he can do. You have to lead men in war by bringing them along to endure and to display qualities of fortitude that are beyond the average man's thought of what he should be expected to do. You have to inspire them when they are hungry and exhausted and desperately uncomfortable and in great danger; and only a man of positive characteristics of leadership, with the physical stamina that goes with it, can function under those conditions.*
>
> *-General George C. Marshall, Testimony to the U.S. Senate Committee on Military Affairs (1940)*

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[47] Clive R. Boddy, "Corporate Psychopaths, Conflict, Employee Affective Well-Being and Counterproductive Work Behaviour," *Middlesex University Business School,* 20 November 2012, p. 118.

[48] Ibid.

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