

PREVENTING TOXIC LEADERSHIP THROUGH
PROFESSIONAL MILITARY EDUCATION

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fulfillment of the requirements for the
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MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE
General Studies

by

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ABSTRACT

PREVENTING TOXIC LEADERSHIP THROUGH PROFESSIONAL MILITARY EDUCATION, by John A. Anderson, USAF, 76 pages.

Toxic leadership continues to plague the U.S. Army and other services, even though there are multiple publications written on leadership expectations. This thesis asks, if through the education at CGSOC, toxic leadership can be mitigated in the future Field Grade Officers. To do so this thesis uses the toxic triangle as a methodology to analyze a case study of a former Battalion Commander that was relieved of command after a 15-6 investigation deemed them a toxic leader and they created a negative command climate. This thesis makes two recommendations to help mitigate toxic leadership with education through CGSOC. First, a larger portion of the curriculum of CGSOC should focus on toxic leadership, the followers and environments that support it by integrating elements of the toxic triangle. Second, is to expand leadership doctrine to include a more in depth discussion on toxic leadership and how it effects organizations, to include examples. This thesis closes with a discussion on obstacles hindering the use of the toxic triangle in CGSOC

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ACRONYMS

AR	Army Regulation
CGSOC	Command and General Staff Officer Course
FGO	Field Grade Officer
SNCO	Senior Non-Commissioned Officer

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

He who feels the respect which is due others cannot fail to inspire in them regard for himself; while he who feels, and hence manifests, disrespect toward others, especially his inferiors, cannot fail to inspire hatred against himself.¹

— Major General John M. Schofield

The Army's leadership doctrine, Army Doctrine Publication 6-22 and Army Doctrine Reference Publication 6-22, briefly describe toxic leadership. The Army's Leader Requirements Model emphasizes the positive attributes that leaders must possess to be successful. Intended to be the all-inclusive leadership model, it does not include the opposing attributes that tend to foster toxic leadership behaviors. Although Army Regulation (AR) 600-100 provides a detailed description of toxic leadership, ARs are not as widely read and their influence on Professional Military Education courses, such as the Command and General Staff Officer Course (CGSOC), have less impact than the doctrinal leadership manuals.

An apparent lack of institutional emphasis on understanding toxic leadership and how both the subordinates and the environment enable these dysfunctional leaders exposes a gap in the collective understanding of how toxic leaders develop. Therefore, this thesis intends to examine the phenomenon of toxic leadership using a case study methodology and the "Toxic Triangle," which is a theoretical model developed by

¹ Dale R. Wilson, "Schofield's Definition of Discipline," *Command Performance Leadership Blog*, last modified December 18, 2012, accessed April 17, 2019, <https://commandperformanceleadership.wordpress.com/2012/02/23/schofields-definition-of-discipline/>.

researchers from North Carolina State University.² The results of this examination are intended to provide practical suggestions that could be incorporated in Professional Military Education courses, such as CGSOC, which might positively affect future incidents of toxic leadership.

Background of the Problem

The United States Army has developed some of the most successful military leaders in the world, including Generals George C. Marshall, Matthew B. Ridgway, and Norman Schwarzkopf. The Army can develop these leaders, at least in part, through its fundamental belief and intense focus on preparing leaders for complicated and complex problems through Professional Military Education courses, such as CGSOC, the School for Advanced Military Studies, and the Senior Service College. These courses are intended to develop positive competencies, skills, and behaviors that subordinates may emulate to improve the organization. Importantly, these behaviors and competencies are diametrically opposed to those exhibited by toxic leaders.

Toxic leaders frequently demonstrate self-centered and even narcissistic patterns of behavior that are destructive to their subordinates, the mission, and ultimately the profession of arms. Despite the effort to develop and sustain leaders who are inspirational, ethical, sound, and self-sacrificing, the institution has promoted through the ranks and to positions of great responsibility some highly destructive, toxic leaders. For

² Art Padilla, Robert Hogan, and Robert B. Kaiser, “The Toxic Triangle: Destructive Leaders, Susceptible Followers, and Conducive Environments,” *The Leadership Quarterly* 18, no. 3 (June 2007): 176-94, doi:10.1016/j.leaqua.2007.03.001.

example, Brigadier General Scott F. Donahue was reported as an abusive taskmaster, during his time as the commander of the Army Corps of Engineers.³

Army Regulation 600-100 prescribes the standards and describes the expectations for Army leadership development throughout its institutions. Additionally, this regulation defines both destructive and toxic leadership behaviors as follows:

[A] combination of self-centered attitudes, motivations, and behaviors that have adverse effects on subordinates, the organization, and mission performance. To be classified as toxic, the counterproductive behaviors must be recurrent and have a deleterious impact on the organization's performance or the welfare of subordinates. An exacerbating factor may be if the behaviors demonstrate selfish reasons such as elevating one's own status, grabbing power, or otherwise obtaining personal gain.⁴

The Army's toxic leadership definition is consistent with most definitions of toxic leadership. For example, in 2012 retired Lieutenant General Walter Ulmer described toxic leadership as an individual driven by their need to succeed in their career at the expense of others, their style is abusive and potentially ran like a dictatorship promoting an unhealthy organization.⁵ However, the Army's definition does not provide further information on how toxic leaders are created, the environments that support them, or the subordinates that encourage their toxic behaviors. Therefore, to effectively develop non-

³ Craig Whitlock, "Pentagon Investigations Point to Military System That Promotes Abusive Leaders," *The Washington Post*, January 28, 2014, accessed April 10, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/pentagon-investigations-point-to-military-system-that-promotes-abusive-leaders/2014/01/28/3e1be1f0-8799-11e3-916e-e01534b1e132_story.html?utm_term=.c7150f288f8d.

⁴ Department of the Army, Army Regulation (AR) 600-100, *Army Leadership* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2017), 8.

⁵ Steven Matthew Leonard, "Toxic: Understanding the Dark Side of Leadership," *ClearanceJobs*, November 12, 2018, accessed April 10, 2019, <https://news.clearancejobs.com/2018/11/13/toxic-understanding-the-dark-side-of-leadership/>.

toxic leaders, the Army should consider the aspects of toxic leadership not currently included in the regulation nor the curriculum in CGSOC to mitigate these toxic leaders.

Toxic leaders are far outside the acceptable spectrum of how the Army, or any other legitimate organization, expects leaders to behave. True toxic behaviors are a form of misconduct because they are associated with the abuse of subordinates, and therefore counter to the good order and discipline of the profession. Ultimately, the Army exists to serve the American people and protect national interests.⁶ Army leaders have the responsibility to uphold this charge, but require adequate education on how to prevent toxic leaders, followers, and environments.

Problem Statement

It is not known how toxic leaders develop and are permitted to matriculate through the ranks to positions of great responsibility. Army leadership doctrine describes and emphasizes the positive attributes, skills, and behaviors required by leaders. Furthermore, Army schools that teach leadership, such as CGSOC, reinforce, emphasize, and intentionally develop these positive skills. In spite of doctrine and Professional Military Education, we still have officers who behave in ways that are consistent with the definition of toxic.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this case study analysis is to investigate to what extent attending the resident Command and General Staff Officer Course (CGSOC), located at Fort

⁶ Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 6-22, *Army Leadership* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), 1-4.

Leavenworth, Kansas, affects the development of toxic leaders in the Field Grade Officer (FGO) Corps. The researcher will subsequently explore the possibility of adding specific elements of the “toxic triangle” model to the CGSOC Curriculum to improve the understanding of toxic leadership and therefore reduce future incidents of this destructive force.

Research Questions

Research Question One: Can the Army use the Toxic Triangle in CGSOC in-residence to effectively mitigate toxic leadership amongst its future FGO Corps?

Research Question Two: Should elements of the toxic triangle be added to the CGSOC Curriculum?

Research Question Three: Which elements of this model are most appropriate for inclusion in the CGSOC experience?

Case Study Context

The case study for this research is based on an investigation that was conducted at the request of a commanding general to ascertain whether a Battalion Commander, and recent resident CGSOC graduate, had created a toxic command climate. The incidents that form the basis of this case study were reported in the media and, to provide additional depth, the researcher obtained a copy of the official 15-6 investigation through the Freedom of Information Act. Although the information associated with this case study was obtained through open sources, to prevent any professional embarrassment, all personally identifiable information, dates of the incident and unit details have been eliminated.

Significance of the Study

Stress, both positive and negative, plays a significant role in impacting the health and wellbeing of all. The adverse effects of stress, a psychological strain which is the product of accumulated stress, typically expressed in negative terms, is linked to six leading causes of death and approximately 90 percent of visits to physicians' offices are for stress-induced ailments.⁷ Chronic stress can lead to a multitude of health issues to include irritability, panic attacks, and depression to name a few.⁸ Of the Soldiers deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom, between 14.4 and 11.9 percent screened positive for mental health problems such as acute stress, depression, and-or anxiety.⁹ Reports of performance problems due to stress and mental health problems increased with each subsequent month of deployment. Perhaps most importantly for this study, soldiers exposed to combat and what they consider to be "poor" leadership report much higher levels of mental health problems than those with "good" leadership.¹⁰ Toxic leadership is synonymous with poor or bad leadership.

⁷ George Reed, "TOXIC LEADERSHIP: Leadership Style, Organizational Climate and Organizational Effectiveness: What's Style Got to Do with It?" (Lecture, School of Public Affairs, February 4, 2019).

⁸ Ibid., 8.

⁹ Jeffrey L. Thomas, "Summary of Key Findings from the Mental Health Advisory Team 6 (WHAT 6): OEF and OIF" (Presented to the DoD Task Force on the Prevention of Suicide by Members of the Armed Forces, January 15, 2010), accessed December 20, 2019, <https://health.mil/Reference-Center/Presentations/2010/01/15/Summary-of-Key-Findings-from-the-Mental-Health-Advisory-Team-6-OEF-and-OIF>.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Through their self-centered behaviors and lack of genuine concern for the wellbeing of their subordinates, toxic leaders are a significant cause of individual and organizational distress. Moreover, toxic leaders motivated by their self-interest will likely tread on or sacrifice their subordinates to pursue their goals.

Toxic leaders, because they are significant sources of stress, negatively affect the mental and physical health of their subordinates. This toxicity can lead to stress for the subordinates and the organization.¹¹ Stress is known to cause mental issues such as difficulty learning, insomnia, and-or nightmares. Moreover, this stress can also cause physical ailments such as headaches, chest pain, and diminished sexual performance.¹² To mitigate the negative effects of toxic leadership in the officer corps, the Army needs to identify the contributing factors, including the environment of toxic leadership. It is the intent of this research to recommend topics that could be added to CGSOC Curriculum and possibly reduce future incidents of toxic leaders and, ultimately, produce more effective leaders and a more efficient and lethal force.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

This section identifies and describes the specific limitations and delimitations included in the proposed study. Limitations are described as those factors that are issues outside of the researcher's controls. Delimitations are intentional constraints the researcher made that affect the study.

¹¹ The American Institute of Stress, "Stress Effects," accessed April 10, 2019, <https://www.stress.org/stress-effects>.

¹² Ibid.

Limitations include lack of personal information for the subjects within the case study. For analysis of the case study, the methodology required personal information of participants. Such information as childhood upbringing or past traumatic experiences with leadership or in life would help shape the scope of the analysis. However, the researcher was not able to acquire this information because all names on the case study were redacted. Furthermore, the researcher was unable to conduct interviews with persons from the investigation because all names from the investigation were redacted.

The researcher narrowed the focus of this study by selecting a single case study to evaluate the toxic triangle. The researcher chose only to focus on CGSOC in-residence and not include satellite or distance learning students, due to the researcher only having familiarity with CGSOC in-residence. Furthermore, the researcher chose only one case study to analyze against the methodology. Doing this gives the researcher a data point of one, limiting the outcome of the study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature Review Themes

The literature review for this study is organized in four sections: (1) origins of toxic leadership, (2) toxic leadership, (3) susceptible followers, and (4) conducive environments. The literature review focused primarily on journal articles, toxic leadership studies, including those sponsored by the United States Army and other organizations within the Department of Defense, and books published after 2003. The origins of toxic leadership section include the introduction of toxic leadership into business literature and eventually into Army doctrine. This allowed the researcher to analyze the importance of the introduction of the theory of toxic leadership into Army doctrine. Along with the origins of toxic leadership, the researcher will examine toxic characteristics and leadership styles. Furthermore, the researcher will examine the theory of conducive followers to toxic leaders and look to discover what defines a susceptible follower and how these followers contribute to creating a toxic leader. Finally, the researcher will review literature that defines what environments contribute to the creation of both toxic leaders and the followers that contribute to them.

Origins of Toxic Leadership

The roots of toxic leadership can be traced to the beginning of civilization. One of the first documented cases of toxic leadership, a term which was not used at that time, was the third emperor of Rome, Gaius Caesar, eventually known as Caligula, who ruled the Roman Empire from A.D 37 to 41. With no previous military or political leadership

experience, Caligula ascended to the throne when his brother died unexpectedly. An extreme example of a toxic leader, Caligula was narcissistic, consumed with personal honor, and even considered himself a living god.¹³ He was also said to have forced parents to watch the executions of their children and kill off his political opponents. Caligula was so toxic that by the end of his reign he was assassinated by a group of his guardsman.¹⁴ The point of including this ancient example of a toxic leader is to support the point that toxic individuals and toxic leaders are not a new phenomenon.

Leadership studies for the Army are as old as the formation of the Army. The Civil War brought many things to the United States Military Academy at West Point, including the study of leadership. This became a point of emphasis at the beginning of the 1880s and led to the invention of the Infantry and Cavalry School.¹⁵ The study of leadership continued in time and became an ever-growing challenge to find methods describing what Army leadership should be, to this point all doctrine was written focusing on tactical level leadership.¹⁶ The transition to leadership focused literature occurred in the 1980s when the Army published Field Manual 22-100, *Military*

¹³ Biography.com Editors, "Caligula," Biography.com, January 22, 2019, accessed January 28, 2019, <https://www.biography.com/people/caligula-9235253>.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Encyclopedia.com, "Leadership, Concepts of Military," accessed November 18, 2018, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/history/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/leadership-concepts-military>.

¹⁶ Keith J. Purvis, "Four Decades and Five Manuals: US Army Strategic Leadership Doctrine, 1983-2011" (Monograph, School of Advanced Military Studies, Fort Leavenworth KS, 2011), 7.

Leadership.¹⁷ This Field Manual brought about the initial principles of Army leadership, which are shown below (Figure 1). With the introduction of leadership literature into Army doctrine, the Army leaders recognized the need for clarification of leadership models between senior and junior leaders; this led to the production of AR 600-100, *Army Leadership* in 1987.¹⁸

U.S. Army Traditional Principles of Leadership	
1. Know yourself and seek self improvement 2. Be technically and tactically proficient 3. Seek responsibility and take responsibility for your actions, 4. Make sound and timely decisions 5. Set the example 6. Know your soldiers and look out for their well-being	7. Keep your subordinates informed 8. Develop a sense of responsibility in your subordinate 9. Ensure the task is understood, supervised and accomplished 10. Build the team 11. Employ your unit in accordance with its capabilities

Figure 1. Historical Principles of Leadership Inherent in U.S. Army Doctrine

Source: Adapted from Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 22-100, *Military Leadership* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1983), 21-44.

Army Regulation 600-100 has gone through many iterations which lead to the current edition produced in 2017. This volume regulates and governs what the Army’s leadership should do and whom they should emulate. AR 600-100 states that leaders should have 10 core competencies that pertain to all levels of leadership, these include:

¹⁷ Purvis, “Four Decades and Five Manuals,” 9.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

Leads others, extends influence beyond the chain of command, leads by example, communicates, creates a positive environment (foster *de corps*), prepares self, develops others, gets results, stewards of the profession, and builds trust.¹⁹

Contrary to the descriptions of leadership requirements is the description of counterproductive leadership. According to AR 600-100, counterproductive leadership is a series of actions or behaviors that can have detrimental impacts on the unit or organization. These actions range from incompetence to abusiveness and similar behaviors of bullying, poor self-control, blaming others, and abusive authority, to name a few.²⁰ Furthermore, the Army specifically defines a type of counterproductive leadership as toxic leadership, which will be described in the next section.

In 2003, Secretary of the Army Thomas E. White asked Army War College students to conduct a study on destructive leadership.²¹ This study focused on command culture and climate, eventually yielding a succinct definition of destructive leadership;

Destructive leaders are focused on visible short-term mission accomplishment. They provide superiors with impressive, articulate presentations and enthusiastic responses to missions. But, they are unconcerned about, or oblivious to, staff or troop morale and/or climate. They are seen by the majority of subordinates as arrogant, self-serving, inflexible, and petty.²²

¹⁹ Department of the Army, Army Regulation (AR) 600-100, *Army Leadership* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2007), 1.

²⁰ George E. Reed, *Tarnished: Toxic Leadership in the U.S. Military* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2015).

²¹ *Ibid.*, 67.

²² *Ibid.*

This study generated some of the many changes to Army doctrine previously discussed. Other additional studies were continued over the years, of note in 2010, the Army needed to investigate why approximately thirty soldiers had attempted or committed suicide during the drawdown in Iraq.²³ David Matsuda, an anthropology professor, was tasked with this endeavor. He found that among the thirty troops that committed or attempted suicide, eight were correlated to toxic leaders.²⁴ After the Army accomplished multiple studies, the Army published its first version of the definition of toxic leadership in Army Doctrine Publication 6-22 in 2012.²⁵ Toxic leadership being defined provides an important mark in military education for the elimination of these types of leaders.

Toxic Leadership

Toxic leadership is a component of counterproductive leadership as described in AR 600-100. Additionally, toxic leadership is synonymous with destructive leadership. To alleviate confusion, the researcher will use toxic and destructive interchangeably throughout this text. The shared understanding or definitions of toxic (destructive) leadership that are used throughout this text is: toxic leadership is a leadership style where the individual in question has an apparent disregard for the welfare of subordinates, and their leadership styles have a negative impact on the organization. To

²³ Daniel Zwerdling, "Army Takes on Its Own Toxic Leaders," NPR, January 6, 2014, accessed January 2, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2014/01/06/259422776/army-takes-on-its-own-toxic-leaders>.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

understand how toxic leaders come to fruition, the researcher will explore the topic in three subsections: where toxic leadership definitions come from, characteristics of a toxic leader,²⁶ and destructive leadership styles. By reviewing these components, the researcher will be able to discern what evaluation criteria will be set for a toxic leader in the context of the case study analysis.

There are multiple definitions of destructive leadership today. For example, Christian Thoroughgood and his colleagues define a holistic view of destructive leadership as:

[A] complex process of influence between flawed, toxic, or ineffective leaders, susceptible followers, and conducive environments, which unfolds over time and, on balance, culminates in a destructive group or organizational outcomes that compromise the quality of life for internal and external constituents and detract from their group-focused goals or purposes.²⁷

Examining this definition, the reader can see that destructive leadership in this context not only encompasses toxic leaders, but also followers and environments associated with them. This is a relevant factor because over history researchers have typically defined toxic leadership based on personality traits and behaviors of the leader and not the associated effects the followers and environments have on the leaders.²⁸ This type of view of leadership is deemed “leader-centrism” in leadership literature.²⁹

²⁶ Dr. George Reed, Email correspondence with author, January 30, 2019.

²⁷ Christian N. Thoroughgood, Katina B. Sawyer, Art Padilla, and Laura Lunsford, “Destructive Leadership: A Critique of Leader-Centric Perspectives and Toward a More Holistic Definition,” *Journal of Business Ethics* 151, no. 3 (September 2016): 627-49.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 628.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

This definition becomes even more compelling when compared to the Army's concept of counterproductive leadership. Army doctrine and regulations define counterproductive behaviors and destructive leadership styles. Army regulation states that counterproductive leadership behaviors range from incompetence to abusiveness.³⁰ Additionally, the regulation provides a wide range of examples of counterproductive behaviors. One such unproductive behavior is toxic leadership. Toxic leadership per AR 600-100(2017):

[T]oxic leadership, which is defined as a combination of self-centered attitudes, motivations, and behaviors that have adverse effects on subordinates, the organization, and mission performance. To be classified as toxic, the counterproductive behaviors must be recurrent and have a deleterious impact on the organization's performance or the welfare of subordinates.³¹

This definition of toxic leadership is focused on the leader and their effect on the organization, which is once again leader-centrism. Now, examine the definition of toxic leadership as described in Army Doctrine Publication 6-22 (2012); toxic leadership is a form of narcissistic behaviors that negatively affects the organizations and its members. The leader has no regard for the morale or well-being of the organization or its members.³² These multiple variations of toxic leadership descriptions have a common theme, which is that toxic leaders are abusive, out for themselves, and will run over whoever gets in their way. According to Colonel G. E. Reed (2004), A leader with a soft voice and façade of sincerity can also be toxic. In the end, it is not the one specific

³⁰ Department of the Army, AR 600-100, *Army Leadership* (2017).

³¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

³² Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 6-22, *Army Leadership* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012).

behavior that deems one toxic; it is the cumulative effect of demotivation behavior on unit morale and climate over time that tells the tale.³³

As previously discussed, destructive leadership contains multiple elements that comprise it. From the view of Thoroughgood et al., are the leader's traits and behaviors, the followers that support this behavior, and the environments that foster this leadership. For now, the researcher will focus on the traits and behaviors that describe a toxic leader. In the Toxic Triangle (Figure 2), Padilla et al. states that destructive leadership behaviors and traits are consistent with five characteristics. These include charisma, personalized use of power, narcissism, negative life themes, and an ideology of hate.³⁴

³³ George Reed, "Toxic Leadership," *Parameters*, 32 (2002): 67.

³⁴ Padilla, Hogan, and Kaiser, "The Toxic Triangle."

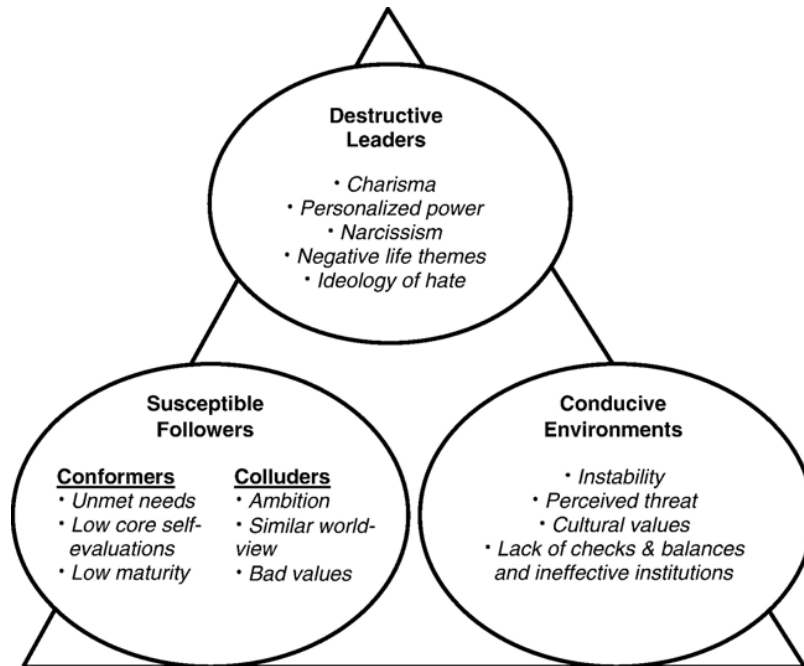


Figure 2. The Toxic Triangle: Elements in Three Domains Related to Destructive Leadership

Source: Art Padilla, Robert Hogan, and Robert B. Kaiser, “The Toxic Triangle: Destructive Leaders, Susceptible Followers, and Conducive Environments,” *The Leadership Quarterly* 18, no. 3 (June 2007): 180. doi:10.1016/j.leaqua.2007.03.001.

Charisma is a personal characteristic that affects the perceptions of followers. Charismatic leaders are often described as charming and attractive, and they inspire devotion in their followers. Charisma and the corresponding devotion are not always positive, and without ethical bounds can be a base component of destructive and even toxic leadership.³⁵ Padilla et al. suggests that charisma in a negative connotation consists of a high-energy leader that is often self-promoting for a vision of their future.³⁶ This

³⁵ Padilla, Hogan, and Kaiser, “The Toxic Triangle.”

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 181.

claim is exemplified by teachers of Fidel Castro describing him as “untiring” and his need to promote his views of how the country should be.³⁷ Of note, the Army’s criminal destructive leadership style is described as being a charismatic, high-energy leader that lies, cheats, and steals their way to success.³⁸

Typically, charismatic leaders who are active and energetic quickly establish their personal power among their followers. This personalized need for power is the next destructive leader characteristic. Padilla et al. suggests that destructive leaders use their power over subordinates for personal gain and self-promotion.³⁹ Furthermore, destructive leaders will use this personal power to coerce or control their subordinates.⁴⁰

Personalized use of power is nothing new, as it pertains to abusing leadership. The Bathsheba Syndrome, a biblical story, used to illustrate the importance of ethical constraints among powerful and successful leaders, is an example. In the Bathsheba Syndrome, King David of the Old Testament and the Torah is suggested to have a multitude of ethical violations due to his success.⁴¹ King David’s success leads to losses in strategic focus, allowing his men to go off into battle without him; he also abuses his

³⁷ Padilla, Hogan, and Kaiser, “The Toxic Triangle,” 181.

³⁸ Department of the Army, AR 600-100, *Army Leadership* (2017), 8-9.

³⁹ Padilla, Hogan, and Kaiser, “The Toxic Triangle,” 181.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Dean C. Ludwig and Clinton O Longenecker, “The Bathsheba Syndrome: The Ethical Failure of Successful Leaders,” *Journal of Business Ethics* 12, no. 4 (1993): 265-273.

access to the city to pursue personal endeavors.⁴² Ultimately, King David’s success leads him to a sense of over control and the idea that he can get away with anything, and it ends with his demise. Ludwig and Longenecker described the characteristics of the Bathsheba Syndrome in Table 1 shown below.

Table 1. Possible Outcomes Experienced by Successful Leaders

	Positive/Benefit	Negative/Disadvantage
Personal Level	<p>Privileged Access</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Position Influence Status Rewards/Perks Recognition Latitude Associations Access 	<p>Inflated Belief in Personal Ability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emotionally Expansive Unablanced Personal Life Inflated Ego Isolation Stress Transference Emptiness Fear of Failure
Organizational Level	<p>Control of Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No Direct Supervision Ability to Influence Ability to set Agenda Control Over Decision Making 	<p>Loss of Strategic Focus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Org on Autopilot Delegation without Supervision Strategic Complacency Neglect of Strategy

Fig. 1. Possible outcomes experienced by successful leaders.

Source: Dean C. Ludwig and Clinton O Longenecker, “The Bathsheba Syndrome: The Ethical Failure of Successful Leaders,” *Journal of Business Ethics* 12, no. 4 (1993): 270.

The Bathsheba Syndrome also provides context to the concept of narcissism.

Psychology today describes a narcissistic personality disorder as the following:

“Individuals with this disorder exhibit a lack of ability to empathize with others and an

⁴² Ludwig and Longenecker, “The Bathsheba Syndrome,” 265-273.

inflated sense of self-importance.”⁴³ The definition further describes symptoms of this disorder as the person requiring attention from everyone, exaggerating their importance and preoccupation with fantasies of success.⁴⁴ Once again comparing this description of destructive characteristic with that of the Army’s destructive leadership style; similarities can be found.

Narcissism appears to be a foundational characteristic of the toxic self-centered abuser, destructive leadership style. As the name implies, the toxic abuser is focused on short-term wins that benefit only the individual and not the organization. Narcissism is not something that people are born with. It is a behavior that individuals develop over time, which means it is a learned behavior.⁴⁵ Another characteristic which contributes to destructive leadership is negative life themes. These negative life themes formulate from traumatic childhood events.⁴⁶ Furthermore, these traumatic events allow the child within them to develop coping mechanisms to help deal with these events.⁴⁷ Coping mechanisms formulated as a child, manifest themselves into destructive leadership traits that we see as adults, such as narcissism or the need for personalized power.

⁴³ Psychology Today, “Narcissistic Personality Disorder,” accessed December 12, 2018, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/conditions/narcissistic-personality-disorder>.

⁴⁴ Padilla, Hogan, and Kaiser, “The Toxic Triangle,” 181.

⁴⁵ Suzanne Degges-White, “Are Narcissists Born or Made?” *Psychology Today*, January 17, 2016, accessed December 14, 2018, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/lifetime-connections/201601/are-narcissists-born-or-made>.

⁴⁶ Padilla, Hogan, and Kaiser, “The Toxic Triangle,” 181.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 182.

Negative life themes for individuals can breed many emotions or ideologies. One such ideology, which is bred within destructive leadership, is an ideology of hate. This ideology of hate can be measured in extremes, such as Hitler's hate for the Jewish people.⁴⁸ These negative life themes are once again, connected to childhood hardships, as they are in narcissistic personality disorder. For example, it is said that Stalin had the utmost hatred for authority partly because people in power reminded him of his father.⁴⁹

When examining toxic leadership, it is prudent to know where this falls into destructive leadership styles. Destructive leadership styles are those that can negate an organization's effectiveness; they can also undermine trust built within an organization.⁵⁰ The Army categorizes destructive leadership styles in five components: (1) incompetent managers, (2) affable non-participants, (3) insensitive driven achievers, (4) toxic self-centered abusers, and (5) criminal.

Incompetent managers are those managers that do not have the ability to lead. This is either from inexperience or lack of knowledge. Along these lines, affable non-participants are unable to make decisions or to take charge, and often provide minimal guidance.⁵¹ These leaders are thought to be charismatic and intelligent, but lack the fortitude to be leaders. Continuing the themes of charismatic leaders, insensitive driven achievers are those that possess great charisma, but are willing to significantly over-work

⁴⁸ Padilla, Hogan, and Kaiser, "The Toxic Triangle," 181.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 182.

⁵⁰ Department of the Army, AR 600-100, *Army Leadership* (2017), 9.

⁵¹ Ibid.

their subordinates. They have the intellect and skills required to be a good leader; however, they demand the same work ethic that they possess. Criminal destructive leadership style is the style that is most likely to send the leader to prison. This leader is willing to lie, cheat, or steal their way to achieving limited success; along these lines, they align with the toxic self-centered leadership style. This final leadership style is focused on an abusive person, physical and/or verbal, who wants to achieve short-term success. This person is also extremely narcissistic, doing whatever is required to benefit them.

To be a toxic leader, one must fit the proper definition of destructive leaders, and carry those same characteristics and styles. Toxic leaders tend to be narcissistic, self-serving individuals who look to gain glory by misusing or abusing their subordinates. It is important to note that all toxic leaders are destructive; however, not all destructive leaders are toxic. Toxic leadership leads the researcher into the next leg of the research, about those who support and enable the toxic leader, who are the susceptible followers.

Susceptible Followers

Toxic leadership is defined by the characteristics and traits listed above; however, many believe that followership is another primary contributor to this destructive leadership approach. Therefore, to fully understand the importance that followership plays in the development of toxic leaders, the researcher will expand upon what followership is, who are the susceptible followers, and how one creates a toxic follower.

A basic understanding of followership is understood by all leaders; followership is what subordinates do for their leaders, by acting upon orders and requests. When searched for in the Merriam Webster online dictionary, it is defined as “the capacity or

willingness to follow a leader.”⁵² Willingness is an important part of leadership because to effectively lead an organization the leader must have a coalition of willing subordinates. These willing subordinates can aid the leader in the creation of a strong institution, or they can influence and support a destructive leader. Utilizing Kelley’s typology, followers can be broken into five different types: (1) Effective, (2) Survivors, (3) Alienated, (4) Sheep, and (5) Yes-Men.⁵³ To understand these types of followers, one must further define them.

Effective followers are those that are committed to the organization; they give honest feedback and encouragement to the leader.⁵⁴ These are the types of followers that all persons within an organization should strive to be to include its leaders. The next four are types that fall into the category of toxic followers. Toxic followers are defined as followers that have the same traits as a toxic leader; lack of concern for their peers, negative effects on the organization, and self-serving actions.⁵⁵ Some followers have been constantly affected by change, and these people must adapt and change to their situation, and are survivors.⁵⁶ These followers adapt to their environment whether good or bad and will influence the same that their leaders do. Henceforth, a toxic leader will

⁵² Merriam-Webster, s.v. “Followership,” accessed December 27, 2018, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/followership>.

⁵³ Ted A. Thomas, Kevin Gentzler, and Robert Salvatorelli, “What Is Toxic Followership?,” *Journal of Leadership Studies* 10, no. 3 (January 2017): 62-65, accessed December 27, 2018, doi:10.1002/jls.21496.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

breed toxic followers, if they are survivors. Followers who are disgruntled critical thinkers are alienated followers.⁵⁷ These are the followers who have been burned in some way by the organization and are now toxic. They want to influence further toxicity within the organization. They actively seek audiences within the organization to do so and can succeed because they are a hard worker with professional power within the organization. The next type of follower is a “sheep.” These followers lack initiative and follow the crowd; they have no critical thinking and will not take responsibility for their actions.⁵⁸ Sheep followers often are not influential or toxic followers at first; however, when they are committing evil acts and not taking responsibility, they have crossed into toxic follower status. The final follower is yes-men. They are the type of person who agrees with a leader no matter the situation or the leader. They can enable toxic leaders by emulating them.⁵⁹ These toxic leaders will reward yes-men for continuing toxic behavior, subsequently creating a chain of toxicity within an organization.

Followers are powerful individuals, they can promote and enable leaders. These followers enable leaders through their willingness to follow them. Therefore, the question becomes: who are susceptible followers?

Padilla et al. combine susceptible followers into two groups; (1) conformers and (2) colluders. Conformers are described as individuals who follow toxic leaders out of

⁵⁷ Thomas, Gentzler, and Salvatorelli, “What Is Toxic Followership?,” 62-65.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 63.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

fear.⁶⁰ They are best compared with the sheep followers previously mentioned. In contrast, colluders are those that actively participate in the toxic leader's act.⁶¹ These susceptible followers are further broken down by traits that define them and their actions.

Conformers share traits of vulnerabilities such as unmet basic needs, negative self-evaluations, and physiological immaturity.⁶² These conformers have potential that will be met, but prior to meeting these needs, they must fulfill some sort of unmet need.⁶³ They need a sense of fulfillment from an emptiness that must be reconciled prior to the achievement of goals.

Conducive Environments

Researchers are aware that environments directly affect the welfare of an organization. Negative work environments can cause health problems, as well as other issues within the organization such as low morale, laziness, and compliance, to name a few.⁶⁴ These work environments can become toxic very quickly, but what defines a toxic work environment? According to Linsey Chamberlain and Rand Hodson of The Ohio State University, a toxic work environment is “a work environment in which there are high levels of interpersonal conflict, a lack of worker autonomy, and a high level of

⁶⁰ Padilla, Hogan, and Kaiser, “The Toxic Triangle,” 183.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Joyce Lindsey Chamberlain and Randy Hodson, “Toxic Work Environments: What Helps and What Hurts,” *Sociological Perspectives* 53, no. 4 (December 2010): 455-77, doi:10.1525/sop.2010.53.4.455.

disorganization.”⁶⁵ Furthermore, toxic environments are set to breed and grow toxic leaders. For the researcher to comprehend how toxic environments affect toxic leaders, the researcher will examine the conditions and factors affecting toxic work environments.

In 2009, after seven years of persistent conflict in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Army started conducting research on the causes of the high rate of suicides. They enlisted the help of an anthropology professor who was conducting research on the culture of the Iraqis.⁶⁶ He concluded that a high number of the suicides committed, some 20 percent, came from subordinates of toxic leaders.⁶⁷ This forced the anthropologist to ask the question of why toxic leadership is allowed to run rampant within the Army. Another conclusion from this was that toxic leadership is bred within the military chain of command because of its culture and top-down leadership approaches.⁶⁸ The conclusion is drawn that the military’s command structure sets the conditions for this toxic leadership. So, what are these toxic working conditions? Chamberlain and Hodson state that toxic working conditions involve interpersonal, occupations, and organizational conditions.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Chamberlain and Hodson, “Toxic Work Environments: What Helps and What Hurts,” 455.

⁶⁶ David Sloan Wilson, “Toxic Leaders and the Social Environments that Breed Them,” *Forbes Online*, January 10, 2014, accessed January 2, 2019, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/darwinatwork/2014/01/10/toxic-leaders-and-the-social-environments-that-breed-them/#3c523f08dac5>.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Chamberlain and Hodson, “Toxic Work Environments,” 457.

Interpersonal working conditions are common to most workplaces, but these also cause the most stress within the organization.⁷⁰ These conditions are set because of the relationships of subordinates and leaders within the organization. Conflict with supervisors is a form of interpersonal conflict that can cause anxiety within the work environment. These interactions can come from disagreements on how something is to be done, specifically a lack of autonomy. Furthermore, a contentious relationship can developed when leaders are viewed as inadequate or lazy.⁷¹ Chamberlain and Hodson argue, to mitigate interpersonal conditions it is imperative for leaders to keep strong lines of communication with their subordinates informing them on such things as what and why they are completing a task.⁷² Additionally, a work occurrence that can favor toxic work environments is abuse. Abuse from leaders does not need to be physical, but the verbal abuse that comes from toxic leaders can create a tumultuous work environment in which morale declines quickly.

Toxic occupational conditions are those in which the subordinate feels as if they have no freedom to work, or in other words, a lack of autonomy.⁷³ The research further suggests that occupations that have more freedom for autonomy are more likely to have

⁷⁰ Chamberlain and Hodson, “Toxic Work Environments,” 457.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*, 458.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

“self-direction,” and therefore are less likely to require pressure from a leader to accomplish a task.⁷⁴

The final condition set for toxic environments is organizational conditions. The research suggests that to understand the toxic work environment fully the researcher must understand the organization.⁷⁵ Healthy organizations are those that are highly efficient and fully integrated, performing tasks with near autonomy.⁷⁶ The organizational toxic work environments then breed organizational chaos, in which these organizations are ineffective and stressful for the subordinates.⁷⁷ Of note, Chamberlain and Hodson state, bureaucratic organizations have a complex problem involving a diverse array of actors such as competitors, professional associations and employees. These groups are able to have significant influence and their agendas contradict one another leading to a steady state of instability.⁷⁸ Assuming the Army is considered a bureaucratic organization, one could ask the question “Could the Army be in a constant state of a toxic work environment?” To discern this one must look at the additional factors contributing to toxic environments.

⁷⁴ Chamberlain and Hodson, “Toxic Work Environments,” 457.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 458.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 459.

In addition to the conditions that create toxic work environments, Thoroughgood et al. suggests there are three factors that promote or destroy toxic work environments: institutional, macro-environmental elements, and cultural and societal elements.⁷⁹

These factors include Institutional factors affecting organizations, institutional structures, and process that define how an organization conducts its work, to include legal and political bodies, to name a few.⁸⁰ One such institutional factor is a lack of checks and balances. It is suggested that organizations with strong checks and balances are strong organizations.⁸¹ On the contrary, organizations without them are more likely to be susceptible to develop into toxic work environments where one leader can have too much power. This centralized power within the organization can provide one sightedness in the organizational decision-making process. For example, the United States Government founding fathers elected to create multiple branches of government to eliminate the possibility for one branch to get significantly more powerful than the others.⁸² Furthermore, with the centralization of power, a culture of dependency and apathy can develop among followers.⁸³ This further supports the requirement for checks and balances.

⁷⁹ Chamberlain and Hodson, “Toxic Work Environments,” 457.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Padilla, Hogan, and Kaiser, “The Toxic Triangle,” 186.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

Another factor in developing toxic work environments are macro-environmental elements. These are social, economic, or technological factors that can quickly deteriorate an organization into a toxic work environment, given susceptible followers and toxic leaders.⁸⁴ Macro-environmental factors are categorized into sub-categories of instability, complexity, and dynamism as stated by Thoroughgood et al. Instability in an organization can directly affect the organization's effectiveness. Coupled with a toxic leader and the organization can quickly become toxic. However, instability does not directly result in a toxic environment. In some instances, instability can bring about quick, effective decision making from good leaders. This unilateral leadership put into correct hands allows the organization to quickly recover, because it puts a significant amount of power into the hands of that organization's leader. Complexity and dynamism can bring about periods of instability, further fueling the toxic work environment. Organizations with complex work environments, such as big financial burdens, can be subject to bad practices. For instance, complex financial trades and long-term contracts were covered up by leaders because they were too difficult to understand by lawmakers. However, regulatory accounting allowed for a better understanding of these complex trades.⁸⁵

The final factor impacting toxic work environments are cultural and societal elements. Culture consists of the attitudes and behaviors of a social group. These attitudes and behaviors can be converted into a toxic environment, if not kept under control. For instance, Colonel Michael Steele was said to have bred a toxic culture within his brigade

⁸⁴ Chamberlain and Hodson, "Toxic Work Environments," 645.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

in Iraq by setting “conditions for a massacre by cultivating reckless aggressiveness in his soldiers, and by interpreting the rules of engagement in a way that made the killing of noncombatants likely.”⁸⁶ Toxic leaders can breed this culture in an organization, and with the addition of susceptible followers, the environment becomes toxic quickly. This example, while extreme, shows the importance of eliminating toxicity from the leader, environment, and follower.

Summary

In summary, the literature shows that there are many factors associated with toxic leaders. From the origins of time, there has always been an inherent nature in some people to be bad, or toxic, leaders. Not only did this occur, but it also flourished with followers who supported these toxic leaders and environments that bred them. With the context provided in the literature review, the researcher examined the study from a qualitative case study methodology.

⁸⁶ Raffi Khatchadourian, “The Kill Company,” *The New Yorker*, July 6, 2009, accessed March 5, 2019, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/07/06/the-kill-company>.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Toxic leaders frequently tend to demonstrate self-centered and narcissistic patterns of behavior that are destructive to their subordinates, the mission, and ultimately the profession of arms. In spite of the Army's effort to develop positive attributes, competencies and behaviors, which promote optimal performance and prevent the development of toxic individuals and toxic leaders, recent examples of toxic leadership are abound. The purpose of this case study analysis is to investigate to what extent attending the resident CGSOC, affects the development of toxic leaders in the FGO Corps. The researcher has done this through the use of a case study analysis.

This is a factually based case study of a Battalion Commander, a recent graduate of the Command and General Staff Officer Course, who, according to the investigating officer, was a toxic leader. Through the systematic evaluation of this case study, the researcher investigated if the Army can use the Toxic Triangle at CGSOC in-residence to effectively mitigate toxic leadership amongst its future FGO Corps. Should elements of the Toxic Triangle be added to the CGSOC Curriculum, and, if so, which elements of this model are most appropriate for inclusion in the CGSOC experience?

Research Design

The research design for this study was a qualitative design because it explored human problems. Specifically, the researcher used a qualitative case study design. This allowed the researcher to develop an in-depth analysis of the case due to the complexity

of the issue at hand.⁸⁷ The researcher reviewed the case study of a Battalion Commander who was investigated for being a toxic leader and hosting a negative organizational climate.

Methodology

To determine if the Army can use CGSOC to mitigate toxic leadership amongst its future officer corps, the author used a qualitative case study methodology. The researcher used the paper “The Toxic Triangle: Destructive Leaders, Susceptible Follower, and Conducive Environments” as the basis for uncovering trends within the case study. The researcher compared and contrasted the elements of the case study to see if the elements of the Toxic Triangle apply to the subject of the case study.

Once elements of the Toxic Triangle were examined against the case study, the researcher was able to determine further whether or not elements of the Toxic Triangle were relevant for use at CGSOC. According to Padilla et al., “The definition of destructive leadership should emphasize negative outcome that comprise the quality of life, constituents, and the fate of the larger social organization, rather than focusing on the characteristics of individual leaders.”⁸⁸ This quote is possibly an indication that current literature within the CGSOC syllabus is not holistic enough to capture all the elements of a toxic leader.

⁸⁷ John W. Creswell, *Research Design Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2018), 14.

⁸⁸ Padilla, Hogan, and Kaiser, “The Toxic Triangle.”

Data Collection

As previously described, this is a factually based case study of a Battalion Commander, a recent graduate of CGSOC, who according to the investigating officer, was a toxic leader. The researcher requested and received an investigation that set the basis for the case study. The investigation determined that the command climate in the organization was toxic and subsequently, so was the leadership. The end result from the lead investigator was to remove the commander from the unit and provide the former leader with remedial leadership training.

Data collection was conducted from multiple sources to analyze the subject of toxic leadership and its mitigation through education during CGSOC. The sources used in the literature were purposefully selected to provide in-depth analysis into the origins of toxic leadership, how followers can contribute to it, how followers are developed, and what environments can play factors in facilitating toxic leadership. Additionally, for the case study, an investigation was acquired via the Freedom of Information Act. This document contains all relevant questions and statements provided by officers, Non-commissioned officers, and enlisted personnel throughout the battalion with regards to the leadership of the battalion. Of note, all personally identifiable information pertaining to the individuals within the case study was redacted to keep those involved safe from professional embarrassment or retribution.

Research Objectives

The primary objective of this research was to determine if the Army can effectively use CGSOC education as a mechanism to prevent toxic leaders in its force.

The research also looked to provide insight as to whether or not elements of the toxic leadership triangle should be added to the curriculum.

The questions that will help guide this study during the data analysis in Chapter 4 are:

Research Question One: Can the Army use the Toxic Triangle in CGSOC in-residence to effectively mitigate toxic leadership amongst its future FGO Corps?

Research Question Two: Should elements of the Toxic Triangle be added to the CGSOC Curriculum?

Research Question Three: Which elements of this model are most appropriate for inclusion in the CGSOC experience?

Case Study Selection

This case study examines the activities of a Battalion Commander and recent resident CGSOC graduate. This commander was investigated under AR 15-6 to determine if their leadership duties and responsibilities were performed in accordance with AR 600-20. Paragraph 1-5 of this document states that commanders have the privilege to command; additionally, these commanders are to conduct themselves with exemplary conduct, per section 3583, Title 10, United States Code.⁸⁹ Furthermore, the investigator investigated allegations of a caustic, hostile, or otherwise adverse work

⁸⁹ Department of the Army, Army Regulation (AR) 600-20, *Army Command Policy* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2014), 6.

environment.⁹⁰ These are all potential indicators of a toxic environment caused by a toxic leader.

The investigator conducted multiple interviews with numerous members of the battalion in question and other outside agencies. The investigator also interviewed an additional 55 current and former soldiers of the battalion.⁹¹ The investigator developed questions to the allegations for the interviewees to answer.⁹² The conclusions of the results from the investigation were that the Battalion Commander was to be relieved of duty and receive formal leadership counseling from senior leadership. This investigation was used as a case study to evaluate whether or not elements of the Toxic Triangle were present. This helped build evidence as to whether or not elements of the Toxic Triangle are relevant for use at CGSOC. The researcher dissected each subsection of the Toxic Triangle and created assessment charts for each subsection. The researcher created a matrix to evaluate, using yes or no to determine if the criteria were met for each element of the Toxic Triangle, to indicate if that element was present or not. The following are the assessment charts that are used to show examples of toxicity within the case study, if it existed. Below each subsection is broken down with definitions of the characteristics analyzed and the chart.

⁹⁰ See Appendix A.

⁹¹ See Appendix A.

⁹² Ibid.

Toxic Leadership

The researcher began by reviewing the definition of toxic leadership as previously stated. Toxic leadership, as previously defined, is a person that has a disregard for the welfare of their subordinates or a leadership style that has a negative impact on the organizational climate.⁹³ The researcher also redefined below the characteristics associated with toxic leadership, based off of the publication “The Toxic Triangle: Destructive Leaders, Susceptible Followers, and Conducive Environments.”

1. Charisma—a person with good impression management skills, enthusiasm, and a plan for themselves. These individuals are typically using their personal interactions skills to advance their personal agenda further.
2. Personalized—need for power - these individuals have a need for power and control to influence aspects that serve their personal interests. They are reckless and impetuous, willing to sacrifice the well-being of their subordinates with no care of their fate.
3. Narcissism—these individuals are self-absorbed attention seekers that are only out for personal gain. These individuals seek unquestioning obedience in their subordinates and possess a sense of entitlement.
4. Negative Life Themes—these individuals have previously had some variety of destructive episode or influence in their life that has led them to their current beliefs. Note: This will be a limitation and not the focus of the study because this would require personal information that is not available.

⁹³ Dr. George Reed, Email correspondence with author, January 30, 2019.

5. Ideology of Hate—these individuals have a vision of worldwide destruction.

They often refer to complete destruction of enemies. Note: This will be a limitation and not focus of the study because this would require personal information that is not available.

Charisma	
Personalized Need for Power	
Narcissism	
Negative Life Themes	
Ideology of Hate	

Source: Created by author.

Susceptible Followers

A susceptible follower is a person that, due to their own personal agenda or experience, is liable to advertently or inadvertently support the toxicity of poor leadership. These two types of people are further broken down into two groups: conformers or colluders. Below are the characteristics of these two types that were used to evaluate the case study to see if there were susceptible followers.

Conformers are those who allow bad leadership to occur by standing by as it happens. They are associated with three characteristics:

1. Unmet Basic Needs—these individuals are characterized as individuals who have a want or a need that is lacking. This occurs during situations such as the

need for safety, or the follower is feeling isolation or loneliness. The follower needs a sense of community.

2. Negative Core Self-Evaluations—the individual has basic conclusions they have drawn about themselves, often negative in nature, synonymous with low-self-esteem. They typically do not have a job or life satisfaction, motivation, or discipline. These types of individuals are drawn typically drawn to charismatic leaders.
3. Low Maturity—psychologically juvenile individuals. These individuals are more liable to conform to authority and act in destructive ways in conjunction with the authority.

The other form of susceptible followers is colluders. They are individuals who will actively participate in a toxic leader's agenda to advance their own personal plan. They are defined by two additional characteristics:

1. Ambition—these individuals have a goal in mind are willing to do whatever is necessary to achieve that goal.
2. Convergent Values and Beliefs—these individuals share similar values or beliefs as a toxic leader. It is said that the greater the follower-leader similarity, the greater the follower satisfaction.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Padilla, Hogan, and Kaiser, "The Toxic Triangle."

Table 3. Susceptible Followers Assessment	
Conformers	
Unmet Basic Needs	
Negative Core Self-Evaluations	
Low Maturity	
Colluders	
Ambition	
Convergent Values and Beliefs	

Source: Created by author.

Conducive Environments

The final set of evaluation criteria is the conducive environment which is a condition of the organization. If the organization is in a good, positive condition and doing well, the environment will promote the same. However, in the case of toxic leadership, the environment would be negative and unstable. The following characteristics will be evaluated for conducive environments:

1. Instability—this can occur from a multitude of reasons, ranging to failing inspections or a significant loss. In times of instability, leaders are given greater amounts of power and responsibility because fixing this type of stability issue will require decisive action. However, once this type of power is given, it is difficult to take away.

2. Perceived Threat—assertive leadership often finds most power and support from those who perceived a threat. A physical or objective threat is not required in this instance, but simply a perceived threat. Furthermore, this perceived threat is perpetuated by the toxic leader to keep the obedience or reliance upon that leader.
3. Cultural values—cultural values vary within an organization. Organizations, however, with toxic leadership typically promote collectivism and a high-power distance.
4. Absence of checks and balances—this condition can be brought on by cases of instability as suggested above. It is considered centralization of power and does not allow for due process to achieve fair and equitable outcomes.

Table 4. Conducive Environment Assessment	
Instability	
Perceived Threat	
Cultural and Societal Values	
Lack of Checks and Balances	

Source: Created by author.

Ethical Considerations

There were many ethical considerations when it comes to this particular case study. First, while the details of the investigation were ascertained through the Freedom

of Information Act request, all names, dates, and locations were redacted. In this way, the researcher made every reasonable attempt to protect the identity of those named in the investigation, while maintaining the integrity of the research.

In this section, the researcher described how the study aligned with the principles of ethical research that protect study subjects, avoided potential ethical issues, and maintained the integrity of this research. The Belmont Report established three foundational principles of ethical research; respect for persons, justice, and beneficence all of which guided the formation of the research problem and questions, and conduct of this study.

The first ethical principle, respect for persons, protects the autonomy of study subjects. To address this principle, the researcher used all open sources and eliminated all personally identifiable information.

Justice is the second ethical principle. This ethical consideration required the researcher to evaluate potential burdens and benefits of the proposed study. Using open media sources, such as newspaper articles and the results of the 15-6 investigation with redacted information retrieved through the Freedom of Information Act, safeguarded the subject identity and may provide a general benefit through improvements in CGSOC Curriculum and instruction.

Beneficence, the third ethical principle specified in the Belmont Report, required the researcher to protect the well-being of human subjects. In this case, protecting the subject means the elimination of all personally identifiable information for the case study. Furthermore, the researcher eliminated any associations of unit location, or gender throughout this study.

In conclusion, the Belmont Report gave the researcher a framework on which to guide the ethics of this study. The researcher used this framework by trying to provide respect for the people involved, provide justice for the study, and protect the well-being of the persons of the case study.

Summary

In summary, the data collected from the case study allowed the researcher to analyze and answer the primary research questions and shed light on the second and third questions. The researcher used a qualitative case study methodology. Finally, the researcher used the Belmont Report to guide their ethical decision making, during this study. Ultimately, the use of this process allowed the researcher to determine if education at CGSOC can mitigate toxic leaders in the future FGO Corps.

CHAPTER 4
ANALYSIS

The purpose of this case study analysis is to investigate to what extent attending the resident Command and General Staff Officer Course (CGSOC), located at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, affects the development of toxic leaders in the Field Grade Officer (FGO) Corps. To do this, the researcher studied a case study of a Battalion Commander, relieved of command that had previously graduated from CGSOC in-residence. The researcher then analyzed this case study in comparison with the Toxic Triangle to evaluate, the presence of characteristics within the Toxic Triangle and the case study. The researcher organized the case study comparison into three subsections of the Toxic Triangle: (1) destructive leaders, (2) susceptible followers, and (3) conducive environments. The researcher has cited examples of each the characteristics, if they existed.

Toxic Leadership Analysis

1. Charisma	No
Personalized Need for Power	Yes
Narcissism	Yes
Negative Life Themes	Yes
Ideology of Hate	N/A

Source: Created by author.

After reviewing the case study for instances of toxic leadership, it is evident that this existed consistently throughout the command. The investigation concluded that the leader be removed from command and receive counseling from upper echelons of leadership.

Charisma—Instances of charisma were not evident in the case study, although several remarks were made about the leader being passionate about their job. While passionate does not equal charismatic, it can give some insight into the thought process of an individual. On the contrary, what was evident throughout the investigation seemed to be a lack of charisma. There seemed to be no defining charismatic qualities of the leader in question.

Personalized Need for Power—Consistent with personalized need for power, the leader in question used profanity and belittling as a constant tactic to get results. Instances of this were captured consistently throughout the case study. For example, a subordinate leader was told that they would be in charge of “guarding the sensitive items container because that is all you are good for.” Additionally, subordinate leaders were belittled in front of their subordinates, and the senior leader made the comment that they were happy to see if they could get people to shake or cry visibly.

Narcissism—Narcissism seemed to play a significant role in the command style of the leader in question. Instances of this ranging from erupting during meetings to getting up and walking away because subordinates were not prepared. Furthermore, the leader in question told many of the subordinate leaders that they did not know how to do their job correctly, and that the leader in question could do it better.

Negative Life Themes—Negative life themes are challenging to analyze in this instance because of the lack of information about the leader themselves. However, there are some instances of a subordinate suggesting that the leader in question came from a previous organization where certain practices, such as yelling, public callouts, etc., were socially acceptable. One could deduce from this that there were previous negative life themes that the leader in question had carried with them.

Susceptible Followers Analysis

Moving forward to susceptible followers, it was evident that there were some forms of susceptible followers; however, it was difficult to ascertain whether they fit the models as laid out in the table below. The main reason the evidence was not conclusive is that with the susceptible follower there must be additional personal background information. Nonetheless, some deductions were made with regards to the characteristics of susceptible followers.

Table 6. Susceptible Followers Assessment	
Conformers	Yes
Unmet Basic Needs	Yes
Negative Core Self-Evaluations	Yes
Low Maturity	Yes
Colluders	N/A
Ambition	N/A
Convergent Values and Beliefs	N/A
Unsocialized Values	N/A

Source: Created by author.

Conformers—The most glaring instance of a conformer was evident through the senior non-commissioned officer (SNCO) of the organization. There were multiple examples of their subordinates feeling that the SNCO did not stand up for their subordinates.

Unmet Basic Needs—Unmet basic needs are difficult to classify within the organization; however, the researcher concluded that because of the environment the SNCO is a part of, they can feel isolated and feel a need for community that is found with the senior leader. Along the same evaluations, because there is a sense of isolation, this may lead to job dissatisfaction for the SNCO. This is shown through examples of the SNCO not being able to effectively guide their subordinates because of unclear guidance.

Negative Core Self-Evaluations—Within the context of followers there are no specific examples of individuals with low self-esteem. However, one could reason that if an individual was belittled continuously and berated publicly, as is the case in the investigation, then one could develop low self-esteem, which could lead to becoming a conformer.

Low Maturity—Strictly based on the definition of low maturity, the researcher shows evidence that it does exist. For example, there are multiple instances where subordinates of the SNCO say that the SNCO was not standing up for them against the senior leader. The senior leader is effectively participating in the creation of the negative command climate.

The researcher was not able to find instances of colluders because this again required too much personal background information on individuals within the battalion. This was a known limitation and was addressed in Chapter 1 during limitations and delimitations.

Conducive Environment Analysis

The last leg of the triangle analyzed was a conducive environment. The case study shows many instances of an environment that was conducive for a toxic leader.

Table 7. Conducive Environment Assessment	
Instability	Yes
Perceived Threat	Yes
Cultural and Societal Values	Yes
Lack of Checks and Balances	Yes

Source: Created by author.

Instability—Instability was prevalent throughout the organization. From the change of command for the senior leader, they walked into an organization that was failing inspections and not meeting standards. For example, the unit had previously failed a resource management system inspection. This put pressure on the leadership and the organization within the case study, which produced instability.

Perceived Threat—The senior leader admitted to being direct; however, the perception from the subordinates is that they were always under fear of failing. For example, the perception from the unit was that if they were to make an incorrect decision, then they would lose their job. This perceived threat seemed to be multiplied when combined with the narcissism portrayed by the leader in question.

Cultural and Societal Values—The military cultural values lend themselves to instances of collectivism. It is designed such that a leader has the ability to give orders to subordinates, if need be. However, this was coupled with previous negative life experiences of different units that lead to toxic leadership.

Lack of Checks and Balances—Within the military system, there is always checks and balances; this is accomplished through the chain of command and organizations, such as the Inspector General. However, because the unit had just failed a serious inspection, the leader seemed to have been given more freedom to accomplish the mission of passing the inspection, which would lead to a lack of checks and balances.

Summary

In summary, the researcher evaluated the case study against the Toxic Triangle by using a case study analysis methodology to answer whether or not education at CGSOC can mitigate toxic leadership in the future FGO Corps. The Toxic Triangle was systematically analyzed against the case study to see if elements of the Toxic Triangle existed. The research indicated that elements of the Toxic Triangle were present within the case study. However, the researcher was not able to evaluate all facets of the Toxic Triangle due to the nature of a few of the elements requiring personal information. The research completed allowed the researcher to draw conclusions and provide recommendations.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The purpose of this case study analysis is to investigate to what extent attending the resident Command and General Staff Officer Course (CGSOC), located at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, affects the development of toxic leaders in the Field Grade Officer (FGO) Corps. The problem is that the current literature in Army doctrine discusses the requirements of a leader. This is emphasized via multiple publications within Army doctrine. The Army went so far as to develop a Leadership Requirements Model that describes the attributes and requirements of a leader, however, in spite of all the literature, the Army still continues to promote individuals who become toxic leaders. The researcher asked three questions within this case study to solve this problem. The researcher asked primarily if the Army can use the Toxic Triangle at CGSOC in-residence to effectively mitigate toxic leadership amongst its future FGO Corps. Furthermore, the researcher asked if elements of the Toxic Triangle be added to the CGSOC Curriculum. Finally, the researcher asked that if elements of the Toxic Triangle are added, which ones would be most appropriate for inclusion in the CGSOC experience?

The researcher examined the Toxic Triangle as a theoretical model for the development and identification of toxic leaders. The researcher laid out the elements included for use in this study, defined each of them, and discussed how they would be identified within the case study. The researcher then developed individual tables for each

“leg” of the Toxic Triangle that includes the characteristics of each leg. These tables were used to identify if the elements were present within the case study.

The researcher then identified a case study that would fit the requirements for this study. The researcher identified a recent graduate who was found to have been a toxic leader. The researcher then obtained the 15-6 investigation that was conducted via an inquiry from the Commanding General to discover the command climate within the organization and find if the leader was deemed toxic. The researcher acquired the investigation through the use of the Freedom of Information Act. The researcher received the investigation in its totality; however, all names within the case study were redacted to protect individuals.

The researcher, through the analysis, has determined an answer for each of the research questions:

Research Question One

Can the Army use the Toxic Triangle in CGSOC in-residence to effectively mitigate toxic leadership amongst its future FGO Corps?

The research indicates that elements of the Toxic Triangle existed in the case study. The commander was a recent graduate of CGSOC that was educated on the requirements of an Army leader through the use of Army doctrine and additional material, yet they were still found to be toxic. CGSOC should continue leadership education, but not just by educating future leaders on the requirements and expectations of a leader. The institution should strive to promote what toxic leadership is through the identification of traits, behaviors, and characteristics of toxic leadership. Furthermore, the college should introduce the theory of followers susceptible to and environments that

foster toxic leadership. With the introduction of additional elements of theory that fosters toxic leadership, the college can help to mitigate these future leaders amongst the future FGO corps. However, additional measures should be included, such as leadership assessments.

Many civilian practices use scientific methods to identify future leaders and identify potential toxic leaders. These leadership assessments consist of multiple components to measure the ability to lead. A list of these are recommended by Select International; however, they are not all-inclusive. The list includes leadership potential, execution and delivery, emotional intelligence and collaboration, learning ability and strategic thinking, adaptability and leading change.⁹⁵ Utilizing a similar test will allow CGSOC to evaluate a student's capacity for leadership. Adjusting this assessment to include elements of the Toxic Triangle will further enable the capacity to identify potential toxic indicators.

Identifying toxic leaders early in the curriculum will help provide instructors and students a basis for what additional education will be required for students prone to toxic leadership. Students can then use the course curriculum for reflection and introspection in aiding their pursuit for a change for the positive. Furthermore, students can reevaluate themselves at the end of the course to provide a measure for improvement prior to entering the operational force.

⁹⁵ Paul Glatzhofer, "Choosing a Leadership Assessment: How and Why?," *Select International blog*, accessed March 23, 2019, <http://www.selectinternational.com/blog/choosing-a-leadership-assessment-how-and-why>.

Research Question Two

Should elements of the toxic triangle be added to the CGSOC Curriculum?

The researcher concludes that elements of the Toxic Triangle should be added to the CGSOC Curriculum. While not all elements are applicable to students while they are attending the course, having familiarity with them all will provide a basis for preventing future toxicity.

Research Question Three

Which elements of this model are most appropriate for inclusion in the CGSOC experience?

The Toxic Triangle model as created by Padilla et al. is show below (Figure 3).

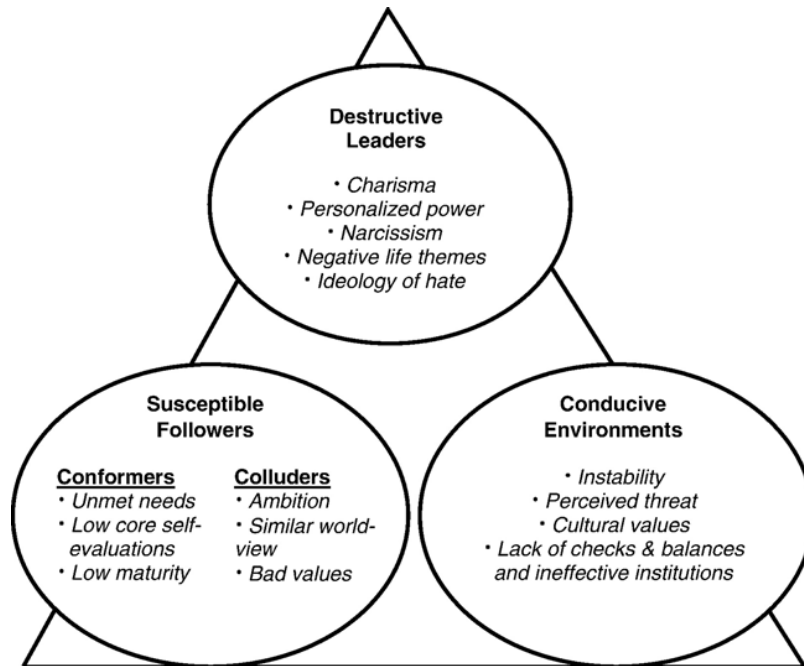


Figure 3. The Toxic Triangle: Elements in Three Domains Related to Destructive Leadership

Source: Art Padilla, Robert Hogan, and Robert B. Kaiser, “The Toxic Triangle: Destructive Leaders, Susceptible Followers, and Conducive Environments,” *The Leadership Quarterly* 18, no. 3 (June 2007): 180, doi:10.1016/j.leaqua.2007.03.001.

While all of the elements in the Toxic Triangle are relevant at some point during an FGOs career, not all should be included in the assessment during CGSOC. For instance, introductions of what creates susceptible followers and conducive environments should be included in the curriculum as an introduction to what can contribute to the formation and influence of toxic leaders. Furthermore, the destructive leader leg should be incorporated into an assessment for students to receive feedback on toxic tendencies. It is imperative that the education received during CGSOC mitigates toxic leaders and inclusion of the Toxic Triangle into the curriculum can do so.

Recommendations

Toxic leadership is a complex and multidimensional problem that is difficult to understand and likely not possible to eliminate completely. There is abundant research that is found pertaining to the subject. In that vein, it was a significant limitation to do a complete evaluation of the Toxic Triangle due to limitations of information within the case study. However, from the conclusions, the researcher makes the following recommendations: predispositions of toxicity assessments, additions of the Toxic Triangle into the leadership curriculum of CGSOC, and peer evaluations during practical exercises under stress.

As mentioned previously, many civilian sector companies use assessments to mitigate selection of poor leader choices into positions of responsibility. If CGSOC were to adopt a similar assessment, it would help provide an invaluable service to the students. Students of CGSOC who assess as a toxic leader would then be able to obtain the proper counseling and classes they need to prevent becoming an FGO who propagates toxicity in the operational military.

The CGSOC Curriculum contains a wide array of lessons on leadership models. However, it contains minimal lessons addressing toxic leadership in depth or addressing assessments for toxic leadership. The Toxic Triangle provides a framework for an almost comprehensive lesson plan for identifying toxic leaders, susceptible followers, and conducive environments. Not all elements of the Toxic Triangle need to be addressed at CGSOC; nevertheless, a firm grasp of the triangle should still be enforced so that students may reference it later in the field grade careers.

Along with the introduction of the Toxic Triangle into the CGSOC Curriculum, the researcher recommends peer evaluations. While graded events provide some incentive to perform without toxic tendencies, for many it will not provide the full reward. Many articles indicate that peer feedback has high effectiveness for not only the person receiving feedback but also to the person receiving feedback. This two-way exchange of information provides instant gratification for all parties involved as it can give points for all participants to learn from.

Summary

The researcher suggests, based on the analysis of the literature and the facts of this one case study, that resident CGSOC can potentially mitigate toxic leadership in the FGO Corps through education. However, education focusing only on the positive aspects of leadership is generally not effective. Therefore, the resident CGSOC Curriculum should include more focused attention on the elements of toxic leadership to include elements of the Toxic Triangle. The curriculum should also introduce peer feedback for students after completion of practical exercises that focus specifically on aspects of leadership. Only through acknowledging that toxic leadership is still a problem and evaluated as such, can we continue to mitigate it in our future FGO Corps.

APPENDIX A

CASE STUDY OVERVIEW

The following serves as an overview of the case study to allow the reader a more in-depth look into the investigation. The duration of the investigation was approximately 20 days. During this time the investigating officer reviewed a previous unit commander's directed investigation to help frame the investigation for the battalion in question. As part of the investigation, the investigator conducted interviews with key leaders and soldiers within the battalion (a representative sample of officers, Non-commissioned Officers, and Soldiers) to include the Battalion Commander and the Command Sargent Major. Finally, once all evidence was gathered, the investigator reviewed the statements, developed findings, and suggested recommendations. The findings are delineated into subsections from the questions developed at the beginning of the investigation. Not all questions are relevant to this thesis, so only applicable questions have been mentioned below:

1. Is the Battalion Commander fulfilling their duties in accordance with AR 600-200 paragraph 1-5?
2. Does the Battalion Commander treat their subordinates with dignity and respect?
3. Investigate allegations of battalion leadership using incessant profanity and/or throwing items, walking out of battalion meetings, belittling and humiliating officers, or use of scare tactics.
4. Describe the command climate of the battalion and identify and describe the cause of this climate.

Answers to Investigation Questions

1. Is the Battalion Commander fulfilling their duties in accordance with AR 600-20 paragraph 1-5?

The investigator surmised from interviews with Soldiers that the environment created by the Battalion Commander was not a healthy one. The Soldiers during interviews often used negative context words to describe the command climate of the Battalion. Such words as toxic, negative, distrusting, were all used to describe the environment. Furthermore, many Soldiers and battalion leaders described a workplace where they were berated and belittled publicly. Moreover, soldiers described an environment where they were afraid to make decisions for fear of ramifications from the Battalion Commander.

2. Does the Battalion Commander treat their subordinates with dignity and respect?

Described as a continuous trend, the Battalion Commander publicly counseled actions that did not meet their expectations harshly and with disregard to any surrounding audience. For example, an assistant S3 was fired and was then belittled in front of other officers. The Battalion Commander was heard saying, “that Captain is fucking worthless, and I want them out of here,” with reference to the Captain that was previously fired. The Battalion Commander was said to have been consistently disrespectful to the Battalion S3.

3. Investigate allegations of Battalion leadership using incessant profanity and/or throwing items, walking out of battalion meetings, belittling and humiliating officers, or use of scare tactics.

Many soldiers within the battalion witnessed the commander abruptly leaving battalion level meetings, belittling Soldiers, and consistently using profanity. Furthermore, the commander was seen, on one occasion, wadding up an important schedule and throwing it on the floor after being handed it from a subordinate. These are both examples of the Battalion Commander showing their condescension with subordinates. However, the investigator determined that while the commander may have used profanity excessively, it was never directed towards anyone in particular.

In reference to the use of scare tactics, the Commander was witnessed by multiple personnel within the battalion to have said, "If you want toxic, I'll show you toxic!" Other examples of threats or scare tactics were in reference to procedures not being done a certain way. Threats such as "crack skulls" for not executing a task in a certain way. Additionally, in regard to a resource management survey inspection, the commander allegedly stated, "Commanders are replaceable," threatening jobs for results.

4. Describe the command climate of the battalion and identify and describe the cause of this climate.

Finally, the investigator determined that the command climate of the battalion was toxic. The investigator referenced a 2012 article written by LTG (R) Walter Ulmer titled "Toxic Leadership-What are We Talking About." In this article, Ulmer describes toxic leadership as an abusive behavior that promotes an unhealthy climate. Further, Ulmer states that toxic leaders abuse and alienate their subordinates. This was consistent with the environment that the investigator determined was occurring within the battalion.

The investigations conclude with conclusions of findings and recommendations.

The investigator determined that the Battalion Commander was not fulfilling their duties in accordance with AR 600-20, paragraph 1-5, which states:

The commander is responsible for establishing leadership climate of the unit and developing disciplined and cohesive units. This sets the parameters within which command will be exercised and, therefore, sets the tone for social and duty relationships within the command. Commanders are also responsible for the professional development of their Soldiers. To this end, they encourage self-study, professional development, and continued growth of their subordinates' military careers.

(1) Commanders and other leaders committed to the professional Army ethic promote a positive environment. If leaders show loyalty to their Soldiers, the Army, and the nation, they earn the loyalty of their Soldiers. If leaders consider their Soldiers' needs and care for their well-being, and if they demonstrate genuine concern, these leaders build a positive command climate.

(2) Duty is obedient and disciplined performance. Soldiers with a sense of duty accomplish tasks given them, seize opportunities for self-improvement, and accept responsibility from their superiors. Soldiers, leader and led alike, work together to accomplish the mission rather than feed their self-interest.

(3) Integrity is a way of life. Demonstrated integrity is the basis for dependable, consistent information, decision making, and delegation of authority.

(4) Professionally competent leaders will develop respect for their authority by—

(a) Striving to develop, maintain, and use the full range of human potential in their organization. This potential is a critical factor in ensuring that the organization is capable of accomplishing its mission.

(b) Giving troops constructive information on the need for and purpose of military discipline. Articles in the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) that require explanation will be presented in such a way to ensure that Soldiers are fully aware of the controls and obligations imposed on them by virtue of their military Service (see UCMJ, Art. 137).

The command climate was one of mistrust and fear of reprisal. The leadership was consistent with the definitions of toxic as defined by AR600-100 and Army Doctrine Publication 6-22. The commander was recommended to be removed from their position

and receive counseling focusing on command climate, leadership styles, and effects of leadership styles on organizations. The findings were approved by the Commanding General and were taken under advisement. The Battalion Commander was initially relieved of command but subsequently reinstated.

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